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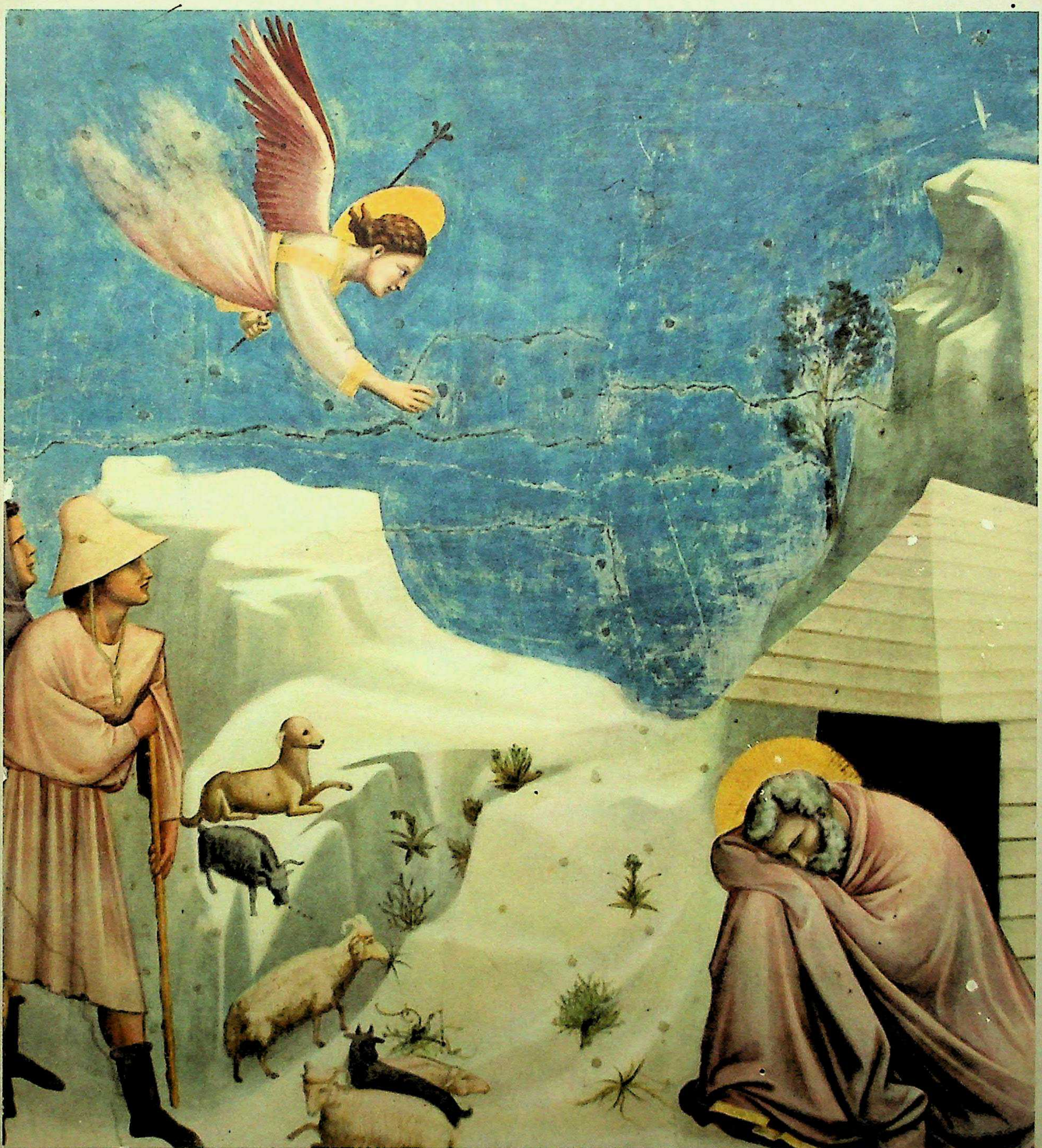
GIOTTO

FRESCOES

SEVENTEEN COLOUR PLATES



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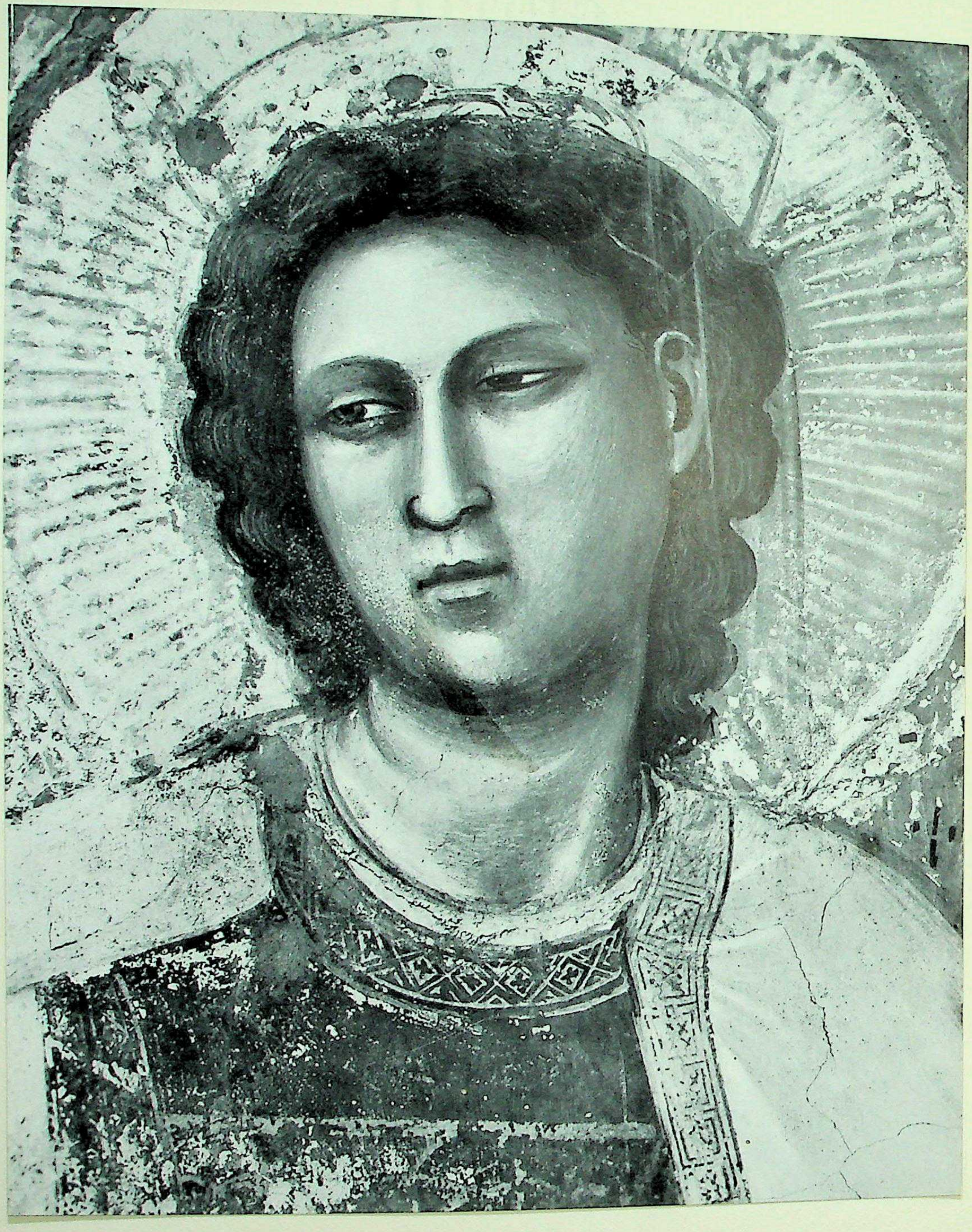

GIOTTO

FRESCOES

SEVENTEEN COLOUR PLATES
THREE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

INTRODUCTION BY
WALTER UEBERWASSER

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THE IRIS COLOUR BOOKS
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ART AND LIFE

"High on the rocky path a man appeared, sturdy and not very tall, planting his feet firmly and with care, and leading behind him an ass. First its well-fed, well-groomed head appeared, then the lovely burden it bore. A gentle, sweet-faced woman sat on the well-padded saddle. In the blue cloak she wore she carried an infant which she pressed to her breast with a look of ineffable tenderness."

This beautiful, almost Homeric evocation of Joseph and Mary on their wanderings is not an early description of a "Flight into Egypt" by Giotto. It is based on a real incident and is the description of two people actually coming into sight over the crest of a mountain. The scene can be read at the beginning of "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre".

Goethe, who conjures up this apparently real "Flight into Egypt", at once plunges into a delighted comparison between the living picture, encountered in the mountain wilds, and a painted original in a deserted monastery close by. That monastery was the home of "St. Joseph the Second", the title he gives to a later chapter. The living copy was, like his painted model, a carpenter, and the name of the young woman riding over the mountain on an ass was actually Maria. The incidents which follow in the book reproduce the Bible story down to the smallest details. The next chapters are entitled: "The Visitation", "The Stalk of the Lily". They are compared detail by detail with the frescoes in the tumble-down refectory. The art which Goethe was contemplating had been translated direct into a living reality. Apart from certain differences, those frescoes might have been the work of one of Giotto's successors.

The fact that Goethe, before 1821, began "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre" with a comparison of the kind constitutes one of those revaluations of the past, begun a century ago, on which almost all our modern conception of art is based. The first art societies and the first brotherhoods of the Nazarenes were founded. While the rest of the world was still lost in the admiration of Raphael, one of their spiritual fathers, the Tyrolese artist Joseph Anton Koch, had himself shut into the

Campo Santo at Pisa for three days to study the fresco-cycles there. At the same time, the long-lost feeling for the greatest originators of Italian painting revived. In 1820 J. D. Passavant wrote on the art of the Trecento "in order to determine the standpoint from which the new German school of painting is to be regarded". As far back as 1827, Friedrich von Rumohr was digging deep into the welter of documents under which Giotto's name was almost buried. In 1835, Ernst Forster published his essays on Giotto. "If we have new possibilities of understanding the art of Giotto" wrote Salvini, "we owe them to the German Romantics." The feeling of kinship with that art lasted throughout the century. It culminated in 1912 with Friedrich Rintelen's superb new interpretation: "Giotto's stories are works of architecture. A living balance of stresses, a web of crystal-clear relationships —that is Giotto's manner of narration."

LIFE AND DATES

If we are to believe a note of Vasari's, even in his lifetime the fame of the first Italian master had spread throughout Italy, from Lombardy to the Kingdom of Naples and even to Avignon. At such remote times, legend is more powerful than history. In nearly every detail, one account is coupled with a second, and which of them is true has still to be determined.

The date of Giotto di Bondone's birth, according to Vasari, was 1276. According to Antonio Puccio's "Centiloquio", on the other hand, which was published in 1373, the master was born in 1267. It is, however, stated in that work that Giotto died in 1336 (or 1337) at the age of seventy.

Giotto's birthplace was certainly in the Mugello Valley near Florence. At one time it was believed to be Vicchio di Mugello, but now the honour has fallen to the hamlet of Colle, near Vespignano.

There are also two legends about the master's boyhood. According to the older one, which dates from 1395, the little Ambrogiotto had been apprenticed to a linen-weaver in Florence. But as often as he could, he would elude his master's vigilance and make his appearance in Cimabue's studio. In this, the dramatic version, we can feel that atmosphere of craftsmanship which is to be observed everywhere in Giotto's painting, from the fabrics, draped or smooth, to the buildings and woodwork. According to another account, by Ghiberti, which dates from 1452, the man who re-created nature had spent his boyhood among shepherds. Ghiberti relates how Cimabue, walking in the hills of Mugello, came upon a little goatherd who made the most wonderful drawings of his goats on flat stones, and persuaded his father, Bondone, to let him enter his studio as an apprentice.

This story was adopted by later writers. Vasari, it is true, at once attached this delightful anecdote of a discovery to other masters. Legendary beginnings of the kind are even found in connection with modern masters such as Joseph Anton Koch and Giovanni Segantini. Yet we must not forget that the art of drawing has been common among herdsmen at all times, and that even today there are herdsmen in the Alps who can make such wonderful animal sketches on stone with a burnt stick that it seems as if another Cimabue must pass that way to discover a great artist.

The rise to eminence of the young Giotto under Cimabue's teaching is confirmed as early as 1310 by Dante himself in the "Divina Commedia":

"Credette Cimabue nella pittura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
si che la fama di colui oscura . . ."

In other words, Cimabue thought he "held the field" in painting, but now Giotto's fame was casting his own master into the shade. The delicate, Florentine clarity and precision of the "Magister Cenni dictus Cimabue" has come down to us more particularly in two Madonnas enthroned between angels in the fresco in the Lower Church of Assisi and the easel picture from Santa Trinità which is now in the Uffizi.

The double version persists even in connection with Giotto's work. According to some, after the badly disfigured "Navicella" mosaic in Rome, the St. Francis frescoes were the first great work of his youth; others again refuse him the paintings in the Upper Church, assigning to him at most the four allegories of the Vow of the Order in the lower church, "nella parte dissotto", as Ghiberti puts it. On this view, only the thirty-seven frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua can be regarded as the crowning work of his youth, and this conclusion is supported by the old evidence that Giotto was still a fairly young man when he was at Padua between 1303 and 1305.

There is more evidence for Giotto working in Florence between 1307 and 1312. The one large easel picture which was certainly painted there was the "Madonna of Ognissanti". A considerable part of the many frescoes he painted in Florence has perished. In the two extant chapels in Santa Croce which are claimed for him, doubts have again arisen as to whether, in addition to the six St. John frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel, the St. Francis cycle in the Bardi Chapel can be regarded as authentic.

The only evidence for Giotto's work at the court of King Robert of Naples consists in highly honourable mentions of his name; the artist has been appointed "familiaris" of the King. When Giotto is described as "diversorum magistrum tam pictorum quam manualium et manipulorum", we must call to mind the busy host of painters and craftsmen, the "botteghe", who often had to execute Giotto's designs in several towns at once.

There is concrete evidence for the aged Giotto as "magister et gubernator" of the building of the Duomo in Florence in 1334. The painter of so much deeply considered architecture could also function as an architect. Giotto's tower, beside the Duomo, was built at this time. He had also been at work in Milan shortly before he died in Florence on January 8th, 1337.

Following up his account of the master's childhood, Ghiberti summarized his life-work in the following words: "Casting the crudities of the Byzantines behind him, he created the 'arte nuova'. He painted most excellent works in Florence and other cities. He came to the fore with great brilliance in Etruria. His host of pupils was as well taught as the ancient Greeks. Giotto saw in art what others never achieved. He created truth to nature in art, and grace with it, by observing the art of proportion. The most skilled of men in all the arts, he discovered and recognized much that had been buried for nearly six hundred years."

Even today there is discussion as to what is meant by the three momentous ideas:
Arte nuova—the new art
arte naturale—art based on the observation of nature
non uscendo delle misure—not transgressing proportions.

THE ARENA CHAPEL AT PADUA

In 1786, Goethe noted in his journal at Padua: "I could not find Giotto's Maria." By that he meant a little church, also known as Santa Maria Annunciata, which had been dedicated to Santa Maria della Carità by its founder, Enrico Scrovegni, and had later been simply named Capella dell' Arena from having been built on the site of a Roman arena.

All that is now left of the larger premises in the midst of a former palace is the bare brick chapel of Giotto. With a single nave, no porch, and very scanty decoration, the plain, steep building awakens no great expectations. Yet once we have entered, the stone rings under our feet and the walls, the choir and the blue barrel-vault expand. From above, from below, to right and left, from in front, from behind, greatness surrounds us. If there is any place where the undying spirit of Europe lives, it is here, in this work of art of 1303-1305. Between the Virtues in their painted niches on the right, the Vices on the left, the most impressive figures meet the eye. Behind, on the great west wall, the "Last Judgment".

In front, the celestial glory of the arch of triumph. Along the two long sides between, all that rescues men from judgment and leads them to salvation—the Life and Passion of Christ, preceded by the Life of the Virgin and her parents. Above, in the vaulting, the starry sky, geometrically ordered, and, interwoven with the constellations, celestial visions of Christ, the Virgin and the Prophets in an eternal present. From the blue of the sky, which seems to echo in the skies of the frescoes, down to the floor with its once-red tiles, there is one superb harmony of colour. Again and again, the beholder is confronted with dramatic partings of the ways. He stands enthralled before single pictures, before the right hand and left hand of the Last Judgment, with the rising processions of the redeemed and the dreadful cascades of the falling damned. At every point, spiritual values are expressed in the directions of movement. The mind rises and falls with the figures and every human movement has a spiritual significance. Like the great cathedrals elsewhere, the little chapel at Padua opens great spiritual perspectives with its lines, its proportions, its precision. But here, probably by the will of the founder, architecture has been made the handmaid of painting. The entire decoration was entrusted to the artist. He himself became an architect, spreading a painted scheme of delicate pedestals and pilasters over the walls. That is what is so magnificent in this chapel. Painting has not come to the help of architecture and sculpture like the servant of some great lord. The relationship is reversed. From the outset, the building was there for Giotto's art.

This was a great step forward in the history of art. The change of precedence determined the change from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Petrarch, not long after Giotto's death, was the first to feel it. In 1349, after mentioning two excellent painters—"ill-favoured", he calls them—namely Giotto of Florence, "whose fame is very great among the new painters", and Simone Martini of Sienna, declares that painting has now reached greater heights than sculpture.

THE PICTURE CYCLE AS A WORK OF ART

Giotto became famous by the great picture cycles which he painted in churches and palaces. The cycle is a form of art which is perfectly distinct from the single picture familiar to us moderns. While we, as a rule, regard picture cycles as a series of detached pictures, with preferences for the "finest" among them, it must be emphasized that every picture in the present album is taken from the great cycles. They have been selected from the huge fresco cycles in the Arena Chapel at Padua, Santa Croce in Florence, and San Francisco at Assisi.

Cycles do not obey the same laws as single pictures. Their development goes back thousands of years. The picture cycle is a continuous narrative in pictures. While this form developed into a new and epoch-making form of western art in the mosaics and illuminated Gospels of the 4th and 5th centuries, its derivation from such things as the friezes of late classical times can still be felt. As we can see by

Trajan's Column in Rome, sculptured or painted narrative proceeded in endless bands without any separation between the scenes. In a manuscript such as the Genesis preserved in Vienna, the Fall of Man appears in no less than five variations of the story side by side. It was not until later that the few decisive moments were selected from all the variants of the story and combined in separate pictures. The summit of this development was reached by Giotto.

When the traveller of today enters a frescoed chapel of the kind and seeks with delight for the rocks and thickets he has passed on his way, he will soon realize that this kind of art has certainly begun to discover nature, but takes few motives from landscape. True, there are trees here and there, rounded or branched in almost late classical form; there are, in the "Noli me tangere" for instance, a few bushes which may be taken for a garden. There are craggy rocks, their forms picked out by light. But it is immediately clear that the landscape plays no predominant part in the whole. It is the figures and their actions which proceed continuously from picture to picture. The painted landscape is a mere background to the movements of the figures acting in it. We moderns start out from the landscape and look for the figures in it, but in these cycles, as yet void of perspective, we shall, on closer inspection, recognize a contrary principle; landscape and space first come into being round and behind the figures.

Houses and other buldings also appear. While we are accustomed to see and imagine the figures *in* the buildings, the masters of the cycles again work on the same principle. Their houses, often curiously foreshortened and simplified, in many cases stand behind the figures. The row of figures in "The Nuptials of the Virgin" stands, unseparated by door or gate, on the one foreground plane. The "outside" becomes the "inside" only when a open basilica with nave and aisles is placed behind the spouses (Plate IV). Thus forms of representation are continued which were already current in late classical times. We should even misunderstand "Joachim Asleep" if we imagine he fell asleep in front of the wattled hut. He must be imagined inside his hut in exactly the same way as the sleeping Abraham "in front of" a similar hut in the Vienna Genesis.

Passing along the fresco-covered walls, from figure to figure, from scene to scene, we begin, to our astonishment, to recapture a lost form of art. In it, life is still conceived as a journey. Not only the life of Christ, which begins with the journey to Jerusalem, continues in the Flight into Egypt and the momentous journeyings to the Baptism in the Jordan, the Sermon on the Mount and the Entry into Jerusalem, to reach the paths of the Passion and the conquest of earthly life and suffering. The iconographical types had already been created in Byzantine painting. They are, however, recreated here with a feeling for the individual life which goes beyond tradition. At the turn of the 13th century, other lives, not before treated in art, such as the life of St. Francis, who had recently died, were narrated in the same way.

Artists were no longer dependent; they had mastered the principle and could turn it to their own ends. Poetry made use of it too. *Nel mezzo del camin*, Dante describes the most hazardous of journeys beyond life and death, and in doing so, takes his place beside his great exemplars, Homer and Virgil. Line by line, he creates his journey on the same principles and at the same time as the great painter Giotto.

As we can see, the actors in these Lives still appear in the foreground, almost on the lower edge of the picture-space. A comparison with the later, more sumptuous Lives painted in the Quattro or Cinquecento will show at once that all the later recession of planes in figures and landscape merely served to confuse the superb, original principle. The laws of the picture-cycle have still to be rediscovered. They appear in no more moving expression than in Giotto's frescoes, which belong wholly to the wall and leave the figures only as much space in the "volume" of the wall as they need for their movements. The whole church is the setting for these stories. The figure of Christ, larger than the rest, moves from one picture-space to the next. It not only gives the meaning to the whole; its size determines the rhythm of the cycle throughout.

The feeling for the power of this art had been lost. Our consciousness had been too much concentrated on the contemplation of the single picture. Even in Giotto's time, the altar-piece, drawing the eyes of a whole congregation, had come to be the focus of that kind of seeing. Its influence on subsequent developments became increasingly marked. Even at the Renaissance, the picture-cycle was cast into the shade by the single picture with the growing depth it drew from perspective. In baroque painting, the picture-cycle degenerated entirely into showy and worthless decoration. The picture grew more and more private, and the artist himself, like Rembrandt, had to create in its small bounds the wonderfully religious picture-space which was once given by the church and the painting belonging to it.

THE FRESCOES IN THE ARENA CHAPEL

Vidi—I saw: that is the word with which Dante mastered the huge vicissitudes of his visions. Heaven and Hell and all the past become through it a personally contemplated present.

It is in similar contrasts that Boccaccio, probably no later than 1350, described the terrible plague-scenes he saw in 1348 in the streets of Florence and the experiences of ten young people, resolved to live in spite of all. He even gives a lifelike description of the famous artist Giotto, returning to Florence "by the high-road, his clothes all dirty".

Again we find the contrasts in the story the young Giotto tells of Joachim and his childless wife Anna, with which the cycle in the Arena Chapel at Padua begins. Joachim, with his pitiful offering, has been rejected in the Temple and has returned to the shepherds in the mountains (Plate I). Here Giotto is wholly at home. Looking at the crowd of rams and ewes pattering out of the wattled hut, we can understand what Leonardo da Vince wrote in the Codex Atlanticus *Nato dei monti*—born in lonely mountains, Giotto, as a goatherd, began to climb the rocks after his goats in order to draw them". What we have here is the beginning of the *arte naturale*. It is a moving presentation of the shepherds by their hut "behind the mountains", and of the master who has climbed the mountain to them, a lonely man now, a *pensieroso*. Yet this composition derives from ancient traditions of Christian painting—we have only to think of the Adam scenes in the Vienna Genesis. Sparse as it is, the scene has height, in the summit which every shepherd knows in his own landscape, and depth, for behind the mountain ridge, round, bushy treetops can be seen. And the old recipe for landscape handed down by Cennini: "Wouldst thou draw a mountain? Take great stones and draw them from nature"—is transformed under Giotto's hand into surfaces in shining relief against the sky.

In such solitudes, the shepherds light their fires and kneel before the sacrificial flame. The angel who has brought solace to the wife, abandoned in her chamber, brings the great annunciation to the husband asleep in the mountains (Plate II). It is at this point that we realize the profound effect of the reappearance of the mountain. It is there again, and under its height and majesty, the sleeping man looks small. Joachim rests crouched on the ground, like a sleeping stone in the landscape, as if he were part of it. But as the angel's message descends to wake the dreaming world, the mountain summit gleams, the dog sits up, the shepherds, who have stood leaning on the crooks, raise their heads. Just as a thunderstorm draws together from from all the quarters of the sky, the miraculous event gathers together out of the majesty of the mountain scene.

For the miraculous knows no bounds; it spreads over all distances. It is apprehended "within" and "without". Joachim knows that he must return to the city, his wife Anna knows it too. The future parents embrace in silence on the bridge before the Golden Gate (Plate III).

No word must be spoken. Their faces, like their haloes, are united. The city gate with its arch and turrets and the attendant neighbours and servants stand witness to the great event in the life of two of the elect. The arch of the gate is echoed in the arch formed by the parents' embrace. The firm structure of the great blocks of stone is the true foundation for the house of Christ's grandparents.

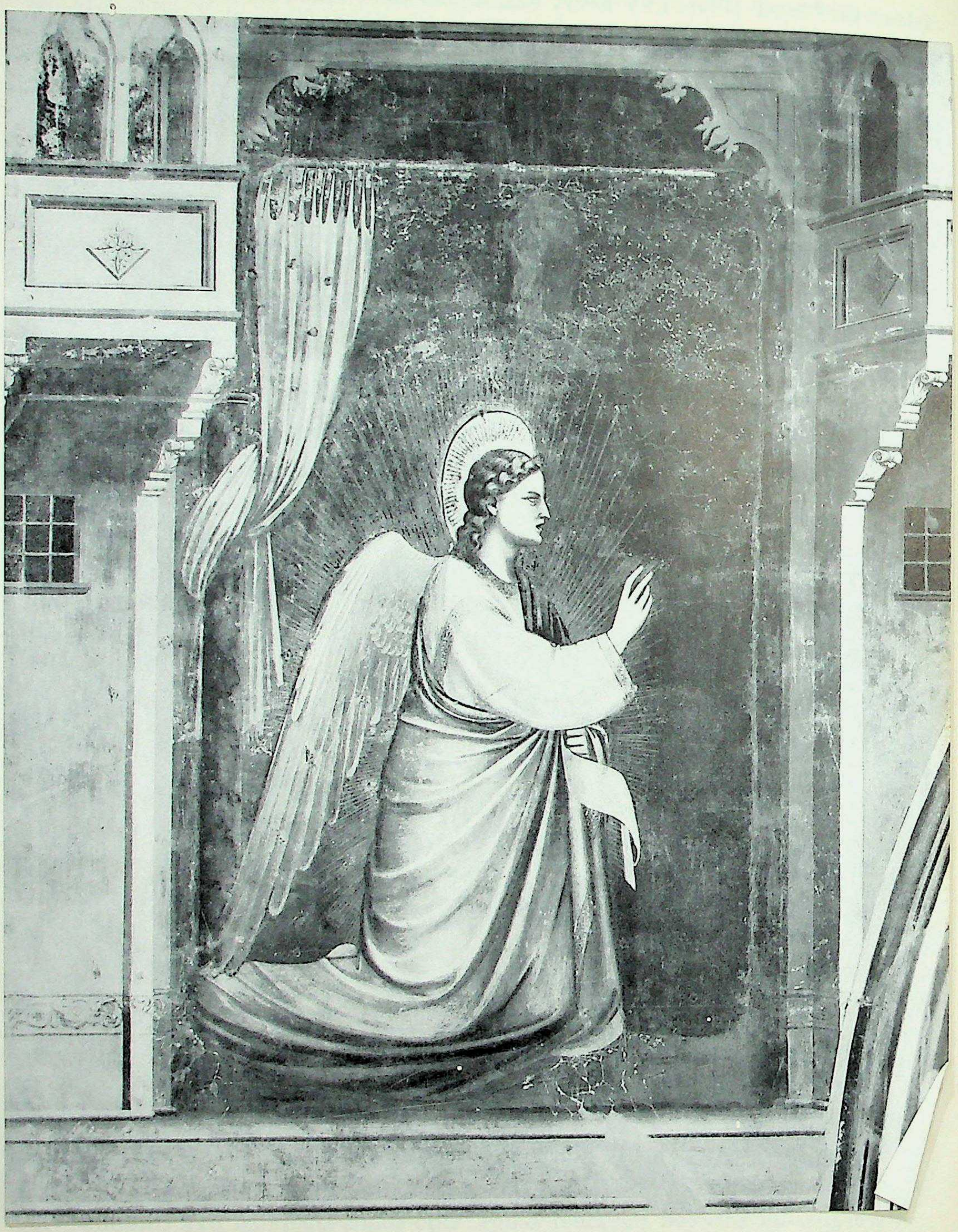
The story of the Virgin born of this miraculous annunciation is told in the following pictures. Every one, especially the Presentation in the Temple, called for reproduction, but some of the most ravishing are those which deal with the Nuptials of the Virgin (Plate IV). Every time a man and woman are united by the hand of a priest, the marriage-guests see before them an immemorial group of three. It was to appear in every church in Italy; Giotto painted it, just as the young Raphael did. In each picture, we see the festal group of guests: beside the Virgin, her watching friends, behind the greybeard Joseph, the disappointed suitors, whose staff, for all their youth, has not flowered. It is a dramatic moment, to which Giotto gives unforgettable emphasis. The group of three has moved out of the centre of the picture, but the Virgin, somewhat separated from the others, stands directly beneath the crown of the apse; she is the holy person in the action. But Joseph stands in front of the vertical edge of the church wall. In proportions, grouping and pose, Giotto's work is a masterpiece.

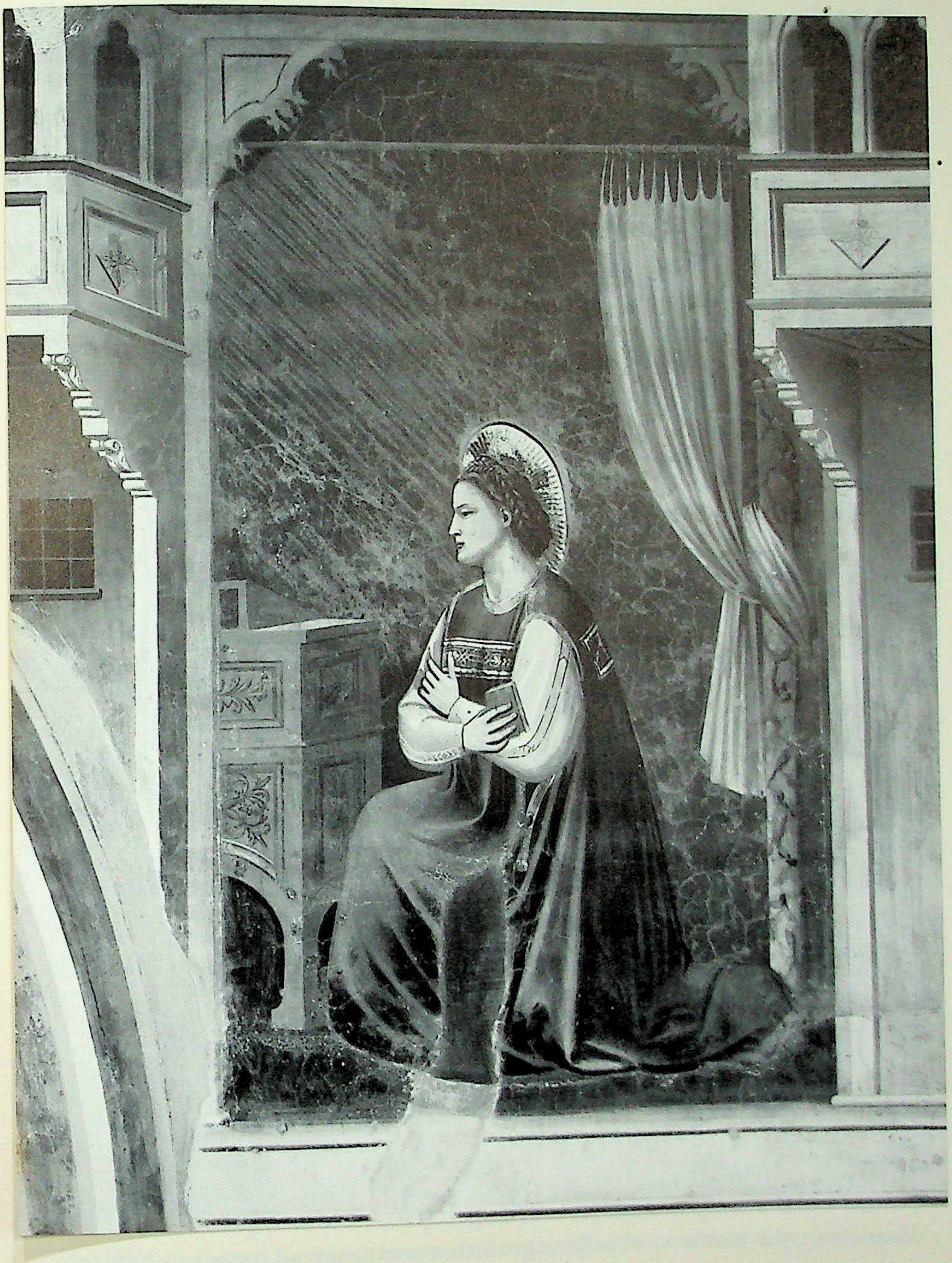
To realize the manner and greatness of this art, we might compare this picture with Raphael's "Sposalizio", painted two centuries later. The perfect balance in number and placing of the figures in it made of it a composition of classic beauty, but the dramatic power of the earlier picture was lost. We soon realize the falsity of the idea that, because Raphael's picture belongs to a more highly developed artistic epoch, it is therefore more "perfect". In Raphael, the nuptials most improbably take place in the open air, simply because he, the later in time, wished to show the church, once conventionally open, in the more "perfect" version of a closed building seen from the outside.

The relaxation from the dramatic tension in Giotto's "Nuptials" is given in the next picture, the "Virgin's Bridal Procession" (Plate V). It was a long time before the beautiful rhythm of this procession, with its flutes and violins, was to be equalled in Italian art. We seem to be standing in the street, close beside the figures, watching the procession pass. Here too the Virgin is given the immemorial dignity of separation. This is the way in which the Virgin might approach an Annunciation, a Visitation, and the stable of Bethlehem, but also the homage of kings. What is to come lends even the youthful Virgin her majesty.

Then the Life of Christ sets in with the "Birth" and the "Flight into Egypt" (Plate VI). There, behind the rocky path with Joseph, the grey ass and the boy, the mountain summit rises as a background to the Virgin. Soon even the most crowded scene in the Life of Christ, his journey to the Passion, is to find room in a picture space of the same size.

In the "Raising of Lazarus" (Plate VII), the whole story is there—the tomb in the mountains, Lazarus, still rigid in death, the women, prostrate in faith and the closely attentive disciples. It is by means of these visible things, exactly portrayed, that Giotto is able to make us believe in the invisible miracle, the things "never seen", according to his pupil Cennini, which are the supreme goal of art. The whole action goes on between the chief actors, who stand separated like columns—the Saviour on the left, the dead man on the right. While the separation is, as it were,





masked by the prostrate women below, it is marked above by the skilful arrangement of the figures in their groups. Indeed, the disciple in the middle, who seems to be transmitting Christ's miraculous gesture to Lazarus, is one of Giotto's greatest creations. This figure is, so to speak, "backed up" with the greatest care by the dense double row of onlookers. It is at once obvious that dense groups of the kind are absolutely intentional; they mark the spaces which the dead man on the right and Christ on the left can dominate as single figures. By a definite pause in the relationship between the row of figures in front of Christ, the solemnity of the moment, a kind of pause for breath, is made palpable.

In a similar way, there is in the "Entry into Jerusalem" (Plate VIII) a significant contrast between the lonely greatness of Christ and the excited, gesticulating crowd, breaking off branches, waving flowers and spreading rugs. One is even drawing his upper garment over his head to lay before the feet of the approaching Saviour.

This is one of the places at which a most instructive comparison throws light on Giotto's artistic antecedents. The master was not a product of Italian painting alone, though he certainly knew both Roman and Florentine artists. It is from sculpture that he must have acquired the plastic quality which Petrarch praises in his work. There are many figures in the Arena Chapel which, with the drapery drawn taut over the limbs beneath it, vividly recall similar figures in Rheims Cathedral. In his lecture at Padua, Hans Jantzen called attention to these connections, which are not without importance for artistic interpretation. A young, apocalyptic figure in the archivolt of a side portal in the west front of Reims could also be quoted; he is drawing his upper garment over his head, his hands are still hidden in it, and it is stretched over the elbows.

The "Kiss of Judas" (Plate IX) derives its expressive power from the strongest plastic motives. The group of Judas and Christ stands in the middle of the agitated, tumultuous crowd of soldiers, Pharisees and disciples. United in their embrace, they meet body to body, mouth to mouth, eye to eye, profile by profile, the true and the false, the meek and the violent, silence and storm.

The "Crucifixion" (Plate X) is the most frequent subject in Christian painting. In Giotto's conception of it, the cross rises from the cloven rock of death below to the upper edge ot the picture space. Rooted in the realm of deadly torment, the Crucified Saviour yet rises to the realm of Heaven, against whose blue the body gleams. In its tenderness and strength, this is one of the most beautiful nudes Giotto ever painted. From the strength of Heaven, He who has been lifted up turns to his own at the foot of the Cross. With the two small groups of five angels in the heights, they create the living geometry of the picture—three answering to five. The whole picture seems to ring in the chords of its groups. But in the figure of the kneeling Magdalene, the bass note of suffering which accompanies all sounds, is fulfilled.

In the next picture, the "above" is transposed into the deepest "below". Once again, men, women and angels take part in the "Lamentation for Christ" (Plate XI) How heavy it is can be seen in the fact that, except for the two oldest onlookers, no standing figure appears in the picture. As so often in Giotto's work, the experience depicted is expressed directly, it is borne by the figures. Christ's body and death are borne by the women sitting on the ground. One bears His head, one His breast, one His feet, another His hands. If the Pietà is an old theme with many variations, what is moving here is the burden imparted to the lamentation by a kind of painting which had just achieved mass. The veiled women cowering on the ground, their heavy backs turned to us, seem truly borne down by grief. Giotto does not merely depict; in these figures contemplating the dead Christ, he awakens contemplation and moves us to all forms of sympathy—by the aged Nicodemus on the right, long familiar with sorrow, by the youthful revolt of St. John in the middle and the general chorus of sorrow in the women on the left. Even the angels feel this extremity of grief. They hurtle through the air, pause startled above the head of the dead, and circle above in unbearable grief. But even this excess of feeling is reduced to a geometrical design—parallelogram, triangle, square.

After the "Resurrection" the "Noli me Tangere" (Plate XII). Giotto has painted it with the one unforgettable woman, the Magdalene, recognising Christ in the garden. She kneels, but with the words "Noli me tangere", the palpable quality of all bodily forms, which meant so much to Giotto, has to be translated into the impalpable. The hands grope in the void. There is between the Magdalene and the Master the distance we have seen between the Master and Lazarus in the Raising of Lazarus.

Mary Magdalene kneels in full profile. The figure of Christ is full face. Only the head and the right hand are turned towards the Magdalene, as if both marking and spanning the gulf between them. The whole is arranged with the same precision we see in the "Presentation in the Temple" on the left side of the main portal of Reims, where the action is carried by a number of figures distributed over the columns. There too, a slight turn of the head and approach of gesture between Mary and Simeon suffice to unite the two figures in a group over the gulf beneath them. The groups of sleeping watchmen in our picture also become comprehensible by the plastic relationship between them. They are like the figures in Entombments and Resurrections which we find on a smaller scale in the cathedrals. They stand out in a kind of relief against the background of the sarcophagus. But in the white figures of the seated angels, we see once more a masterly presentation of the rhythmic union of two figures across a wide intervening space.

These few examples from the Arena Chapel show how the ancient figures of traditional Christian art have become palpably acting and moving beings. With their unprecedented plastic power, they issue from the walls to which they yet remain bound, in large, rhythmic compositions, and in themselves bring to expression the most artistic element that figure composition knows: the mastery of free space.

FROM THE PERUZZI CHAPEL, FLORENCE

A single example will show how far this style developed under Giotto's hand in twelve years of labour, namely the "Resurrection of St. John the Evangelist" (Plate XIII), one of six paintings showing the lives of the two SS. John in the Peruzzi Chapel in Florence. We have Michelangelo's own testimony that this is a sublime masterpiece, for he copied it two centuries later in pure admiration for the master.

The subject is an Assumption—the Assumption of St. John. But since the Evangelist was buried in a church, the picture of necessity became an architectural picture on the grand scale, and thus attacked one of the principal Renaissance problems. True, all the walls which would have blocked the view into the church are open, after the old fashion, but there is an immense progress beyond all the architectural painting in the Arena Chapel. The diagonal view makes clear all the relationships between the north and south aisles and between the apse and the west wall. This transparent presentation has achieved the impossible, namely the simultaneous view of interior and exterior, and hence that fundamental principle of all building, a conception which embraces both.

There is, however, in addition to breadth and height, a third dimension, depth. This too, as it were, goes "through three spaces"; from the depth of the tomb the eye rises to the wide space of the nave and aisles, and finally to the superstructure with the windows. As always in Italian painting, human figures are associated with each level of space.

The saint is rising in a diagonal from the open tomb, between the slender columns which seem to sound like harpstrings, to be received by Christ and His host in the upper world. If this interplay of depth, breadth and height is not only palpable but comprehensible, that is due, as in the Arena Chapel, to the distance between the groups to left and right. The church walls may have become transparent, but the real walls on each hand at the ends of the nave are formed of the dense groups of men. Their eyes cross the space from end to end. The third group too, the disciples surrounding Christ in the air, forms another space—Heaven. Each of these groups brings the feeling of intervening space home to us. Thus on the left, two men are peering into the depths of the empty tomb; on the right, two others, startled, are following the rising saint with their eyes into the upper vault. And if St. John is drawn upward not only by the hands of Christ, but by the eyes of all His heavenly companions, one of the men below provides a counterpoise to the movement by sinking dazzled to the ground before the opening of Heaven.

It is not difficult to understand why Michelangelo was absorbed in the drawing of this picture. The feeling of space in it is Florentine. The later master recognized his forerunner. The heavenly host beding over an earthly one reappears in different form in the Sistine Chapel, in the touching of the first man by God the Father and His angels.

FROM THE ST. FRANCIS CYCLE, ASSISI

The life of St. Francis is depicted in twenty-eight large frescoes on the walls of the Upper Church at Assisi. We may here pass over in silence all the praise and blame which has fallen to the lot of these beautiful frescoes in the discussion of their authorship. What we have to do is to recognize, by a few examples, the tone in which the life of St. Francis is narrated, here in his Umbrian home and the church which bears his name.

There is nothing here of the terseness of the Arena Chapel. The tone of the story is gentle, anecdotic and at times ravishingly human.

The "Gift of the Cloak" (Plate XIV). The saint has dismounted. His horse is nibbling at the scanty grass. The saint is handing his cloak to the obsequious beggar. Neither figure can be overlooked. The young saint in particular occupies the centre of the picture and the landscape, the slopes of which meet over his head. The Umbrian scene is here expressed in a little city to the left, a church to the right, with cottages, trees and ravines, in a way as yet unprecedented in Giotto's work. Yet the landscape remains, as it were, in a single plane. In front it comes to an end in a craggy ridge which is part of the stock in trade of the most ancient landscape painting.

"St. Francis Renouncing the World" (Plate XV). In the young saint's farewell to his father, a dramatic moment has found expression. On the left, the father can hardly be restrained by a friend from laying violent hands on his son on the right, who has found in the bishop who has clothed him a new father. Behind the bishop, the monks, behind the father, the citizens. Even children are involved in the stormy scene, and seem to be on the point of casting stones. The extreme of separation is expressed in the bare arms of the saint raised in prayer across the sharp edge of the church building. Here too, each group has its own building, the church behind the bishop, the house with its flight of steps behind the citizens. Such associations are familiar to us from the Arena Chapel; there are flights of steps there too. But here the steps are seen both from above and below; every column is thicker and the architecture echoes the heavy, squat proportions of the figures in the pure delight in artistic variation, which is present here in quite un-Florentine profusion.

The "Miracle of the Spring" (Plate XVI). The saint has come into the mountains. Man and beast are athirst. In answer to the kneeling saint's prayer, a spring has just been discovered. The leader of his companions is bending eagerly over the cleft in the rock. The landscape is so close to us that it recalls the Joachim pictures and the Flight into Egypt, but the spiritual silence, majesty and tension of the Joachim landscapes is absent from this. The landscape converses, like the monks. Their movement fills the place. And what was once pure space now serves for little tree-tops, their scale in curious contrast to the larger one of the figures.

The "Sermon to the Birds" (Plate XVII). The striking innovation in this picture the huge and powerful trees. Though their size is necessarily determined by their relationship to the tiny congregation of birds, they are impressive in themselves. Giotto never returned to this solution of problems which came from quite different sources. But this way of strengthening the active figure, St. Francis, by means of a listening onlooker goes back, not to the Paduan cycles, but to the more developed movements of the Florentine frescoes.

It is precisely the tenderness of this Sermon picture which has led many to associate this rich expression of it with a great name, with Giotto. Yet the tone of the narrative here is so different, the combination of figure and background so much softer and less structural, that it seems hardly compatible with the whole manner and style of the Florentine master. That difference of tone is so fundamental that it can hardly be explained by a change of manner due to age. At that time, Italians were passionately conscious of the individual atmosphere of every city—we can see that in Boccaccio. This, then, must be Umbria itself.

Yet with the exception of Carrà, Italian scholars as a whole have supported Giotto's authorship. In spite of undeniable differences *(innegabile diversità)* they will tolerate no polemic on the subject of the *storie franciscane*, and all difficulties are explained ed away by the fact that the artist's personality was in process of formation *(una personalità in formazione)* as Luigi Coletti puts it. German art historians have repeatedly refused the fresco to Giotto, even as far back as Rumohr, Jacob Burckhard and Franz Wickhoff; the most categorical was Friedrich Rintelen. But in our own time, fresh arguments have been put forward on behalf of the great master, more especially from the standpoint of an "early style".

THE GENIUS OF THE MASTER

"No source whatever can be found for the exquisite composition of Giotto's Paduan and Florentine frescoes than the master's own innate sense of structure". Thus Rintelen, who makes in this statement an almost unprecedented recognition of inborn genius.

Leonardo da Vinci, in the note in the Codex Atlanticus already mentioned, was saying the same thing when he wrote that Giotto had outstripped not only his master Cimabue, but all previous masters for centuries past because, unlike others, he did not copy their work, but, having been born "in lonely mountains", saw nature with his own eyes.

In the presence of so rare a mastery, there come into our minds the words handed down to us from Giotto's own time: *non voleva essere chiamato maestro.* He would not be called master. The European exploring his own mind uses words of the kind. Even Socrates called: "I know that I know nothing" the foundation of all true knowledge. So individual an achievement as Giotto's changes tradition by absorbing, then overcoming it. For the first time, there appears in medieval art not merely a name but an individual possessed of a personality which, though constantly developing, is recognizable throughout. To trace that personality through the whole oeuvre of the master from beginning to end means more than merely clearing away confusing elements. The beholder who undertakes this close inspection comes to share in the creative decisions of a personal being.

Arte naturale— that was the name given by Ghiberti to a fundamental feature of Giotto's art in the first description ever made of it. It is at once obvious that the term means more than the mere artistic capacity to produce a fresh illusion of nature. Giotto possessed that faculty, and many have commented on it. On the other hand, we have already seen that Giotto achieved his *arte naturale* with quite unprecedented artistic means. His was the first painting in which the figures are palpable, three-dimensional forms; their movements, pose and gestures create an actual picture-space controlled and measured by the watchfulness of an attentive eye. That is the *arte nuova* which inspires the painters, the poets and the musicians of the Trecento.

This *arte nuova* is certainly based on that more alert observation of nature which Leonardo recognized in Giotto. But that is not the whole story. In the poets, Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, there was another element, namely the *volgare*, the Italian tongue as it was actually spoken. In Giotto it is the new corporeality of the figures; they are seen in the round. Even today that corporeality is impressive; in its own time, the effect must have been overwhelming. In creating it, Giotto delivered art from the mystic unreality of the Byzantine epoch, and gave painting the full force of the actual. It is only in this way that we can understand why Giotto, who created a school for centuries to come, never seemed to issue from any.

Another form of art must have played its part here. In view of the plasticity of his work, we have reason to recall French wall-sculptures of the 13th century. Dante, Giovanni Pisano and Simone Martini all visited France. We find in Giovanni Pisano that confrontation of figures face to face which so often determines the basic lines of Giotto's compositions. There is evidence that Giotto himself worked both in sculpture and architecture, exercising that double and threefold art which is so frequent among the great Italians.

This introduction of new elements might have been dangerous had not another factor been at work. Ghiberti calls it *misure*. Some recent art historians, attempting to investigate the meaning of *misure*, have seen it in the beautiful and ennobling effect of a two-dimensional art which was the forerunner of linear perspective. Yet what idea could be more alien to our disproportioned epoch than that of the great *misure*? We cannot go into the question here. The pure rhythms of the great cycles are those which pulse through Dante's verse and the sculptured figures of the great cathedrals.

As we can see by the drawings of Michelangelo and Raphael, Giotto, the great narrator in plastic form, was an inspiration to the Renaissance. In the history of pictorial composition, his influence can be traced down to Watteau and Tiepolo, that is, as long as painting continued to seek for self-contained composition in the picture.

Nor did Giotto's influence cease even after the French Revolution. On the contrary, it revived. But since visible forms were threatened with disintegration, it was the spiritual element which entered all the more forcibly into the investigation of the nature of art.

In our day, Giotto has become a touchstone of the imagination, more than even Raphael and Michelangelo, who have always been with us. In his art, which never had time to lose itself in beautiful detail, what mattered at all times was the whole. Giotto's influence always revives when, as at the Renaissance, there is need for new creation. Thus even in the 19th and 20th centuries, Gauguin, Hodler, Hölzel, Carrà and their schools again turned back to Giotto. Nor is it mere chance that these were artists who proceeded from landscape to the figure, from the figure to composition. And thus we find in those immortal compositions that mastery of the whole which, by its insight into the eternal, might even inspire with new faith an age trembling on the brink of the abyss like ours.

Translated from the German by Mary D. Hottinger-Mackie

LIST OF PLATES

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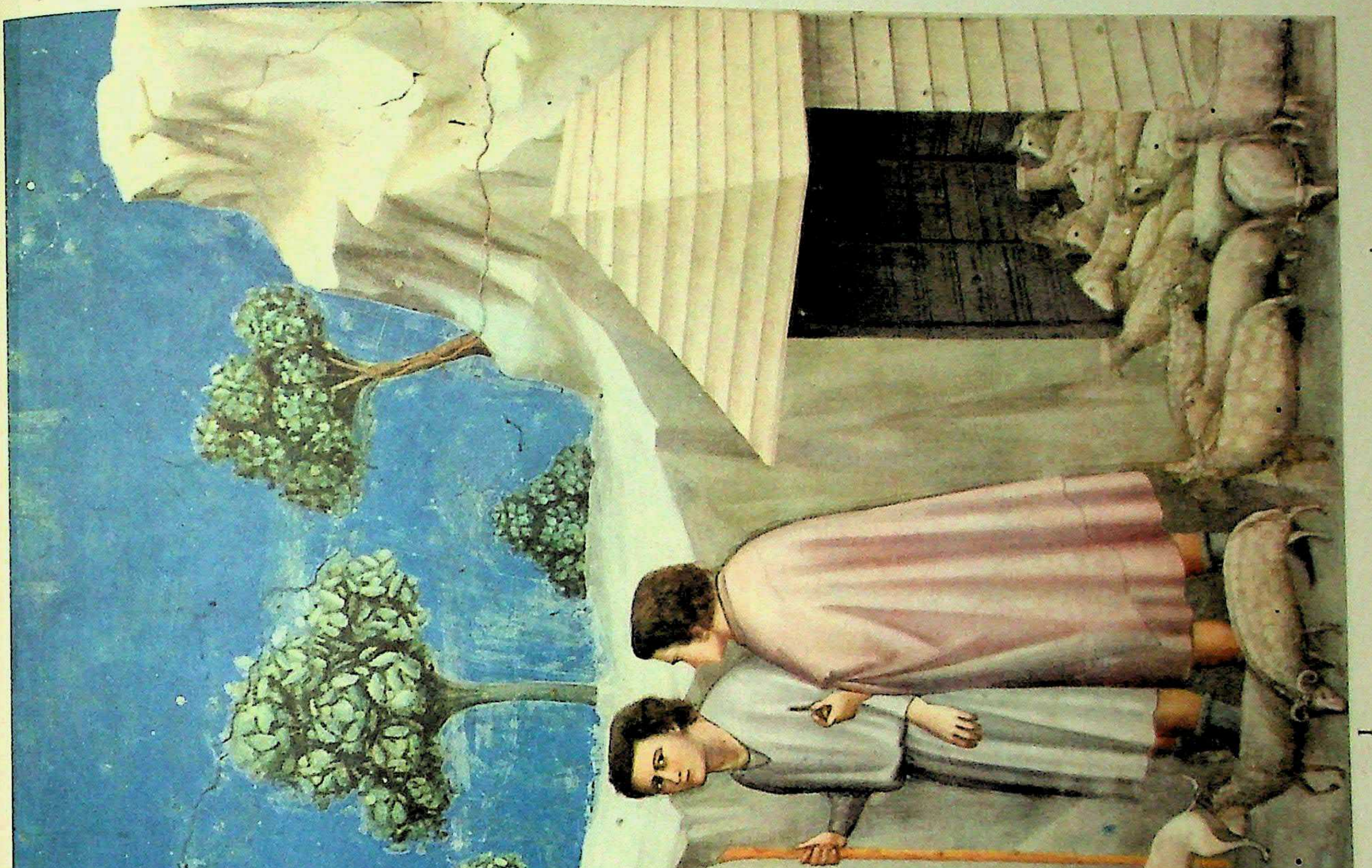
PLATES



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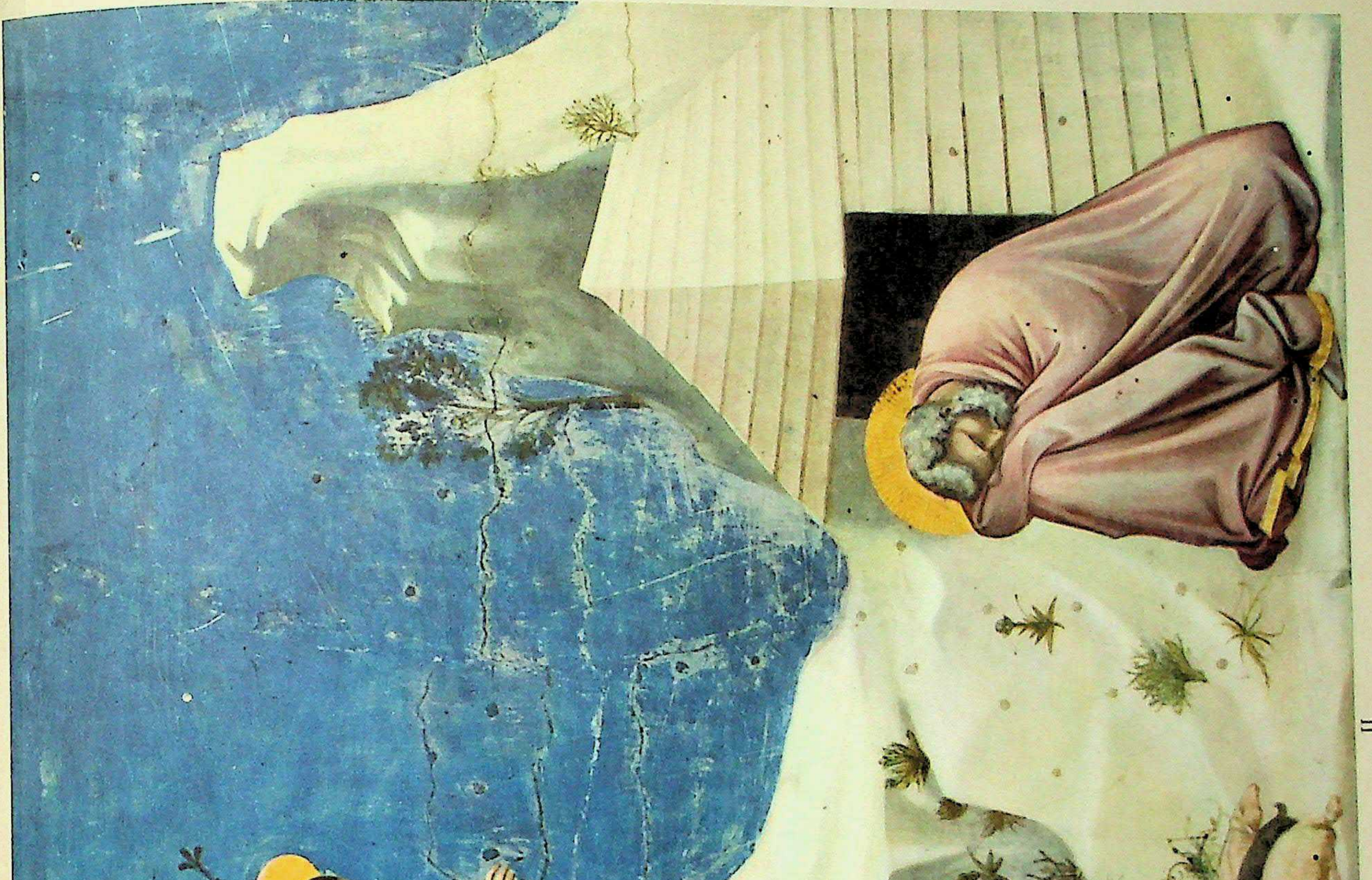

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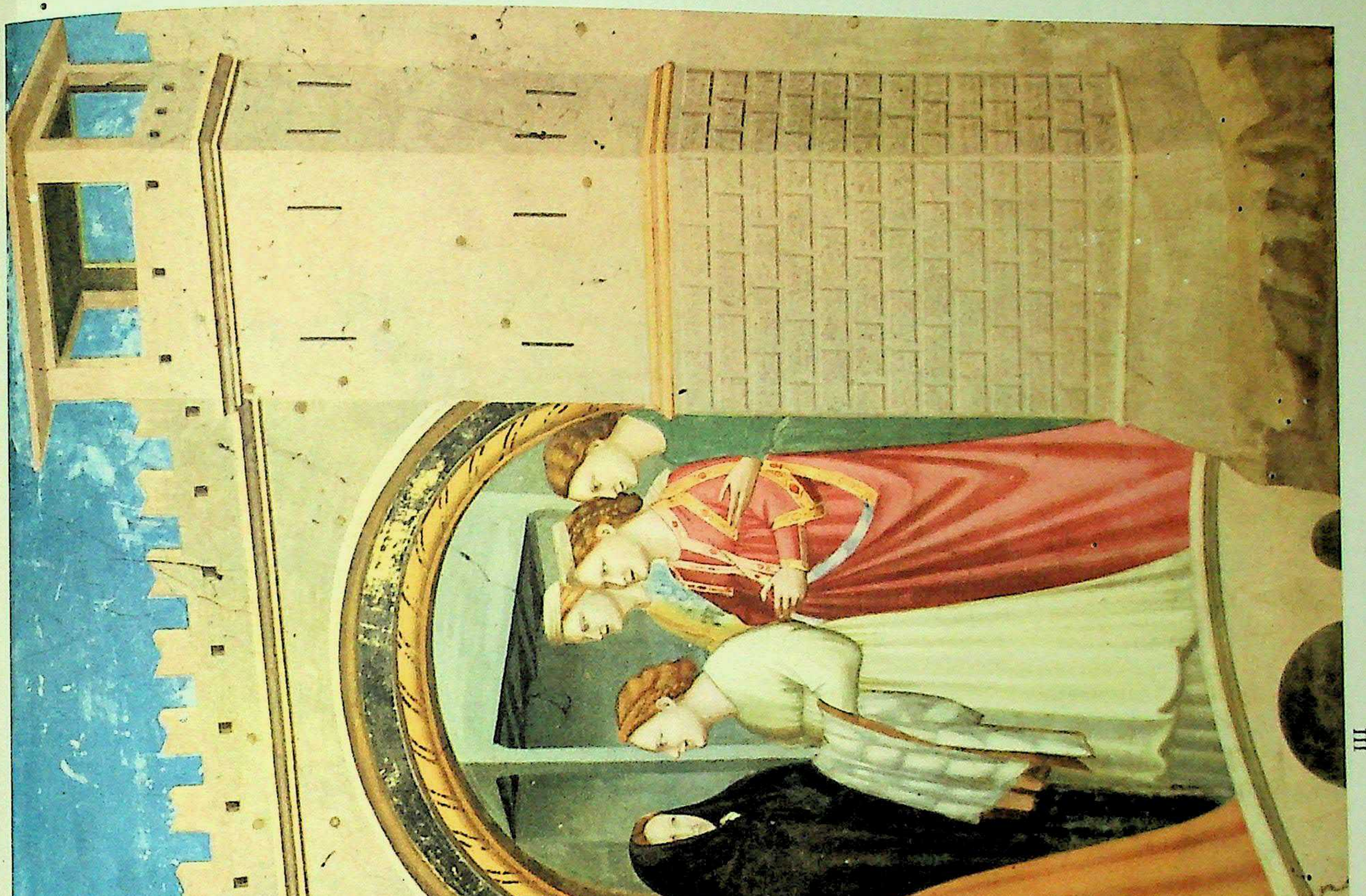

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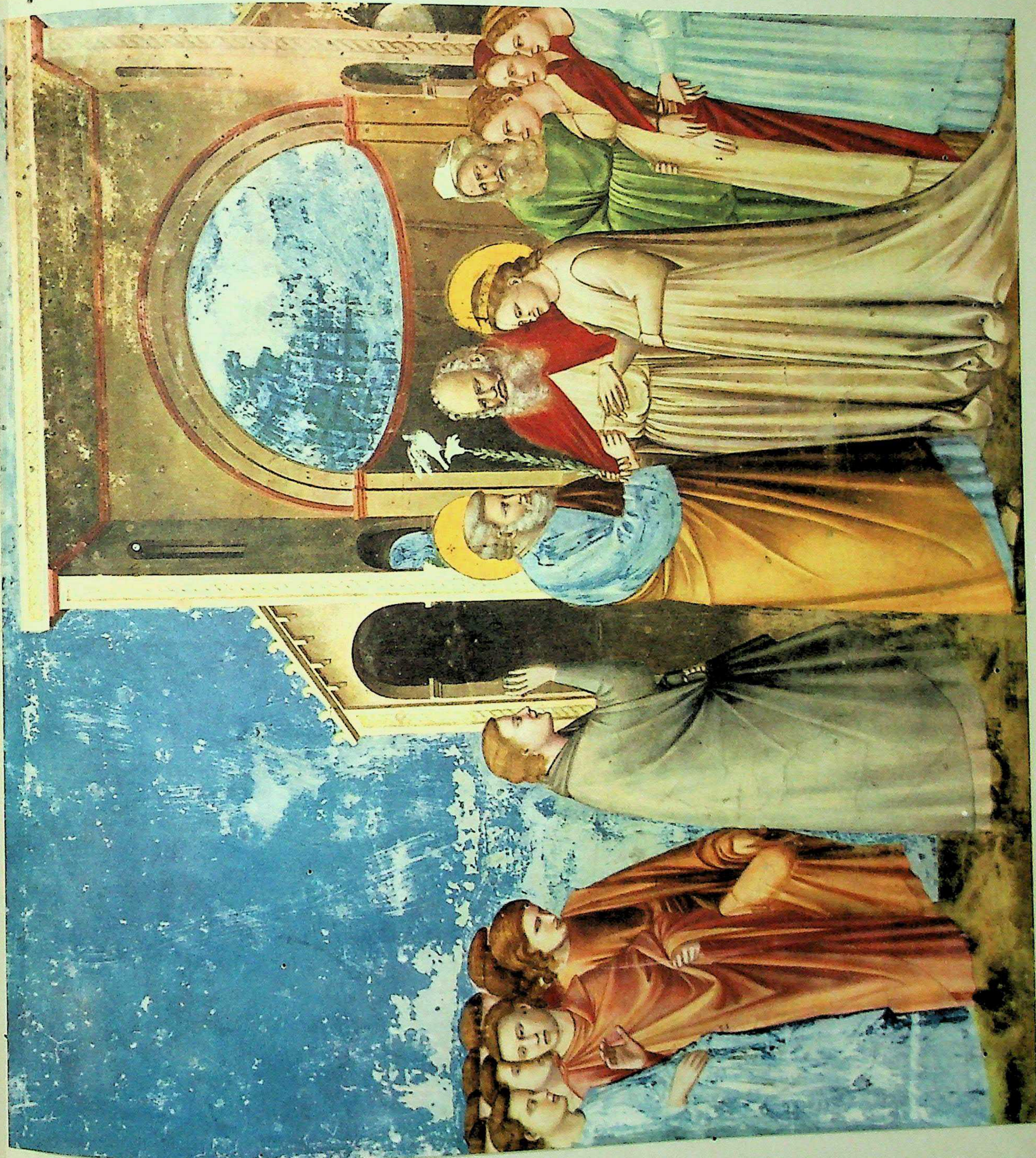

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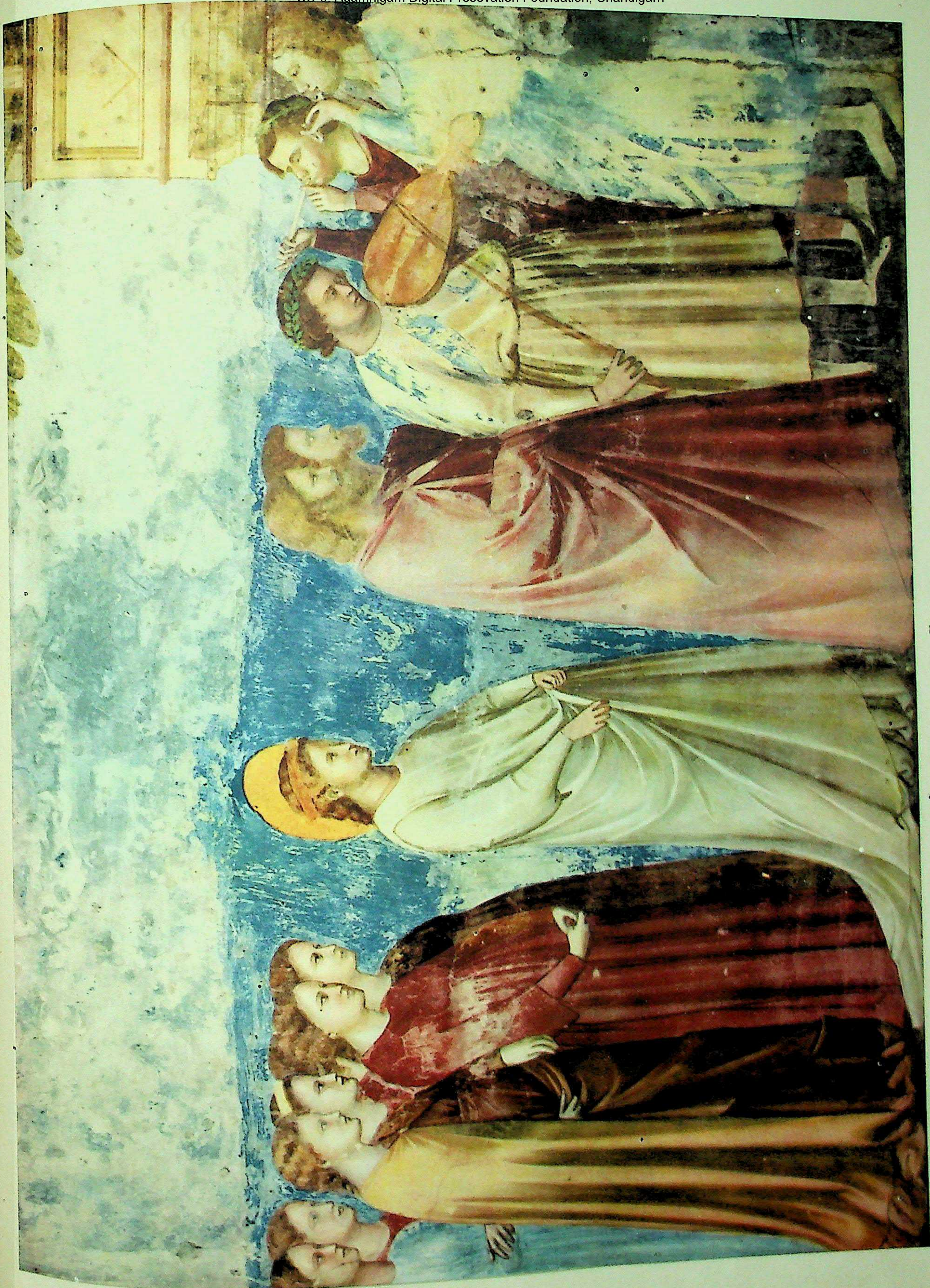

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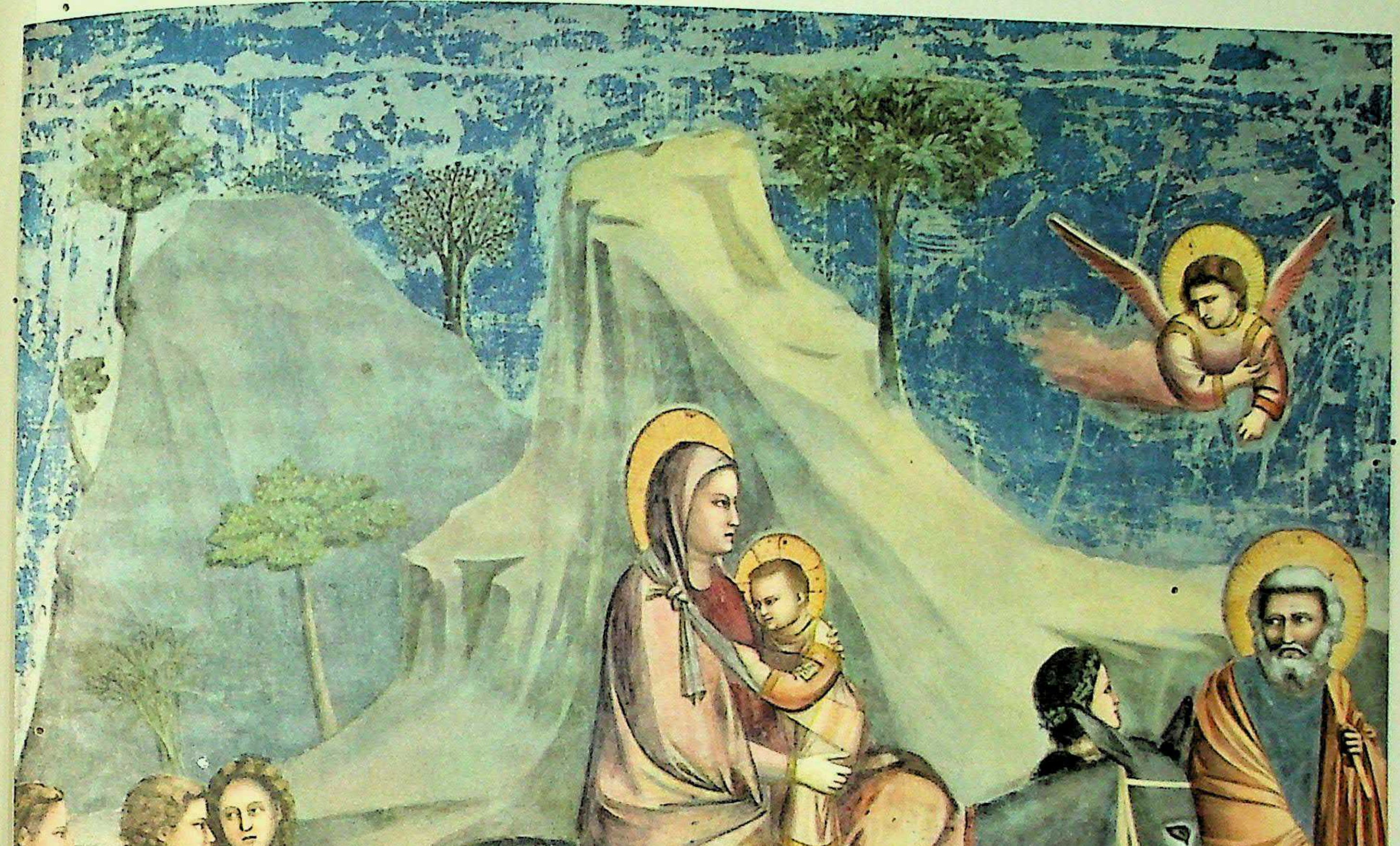

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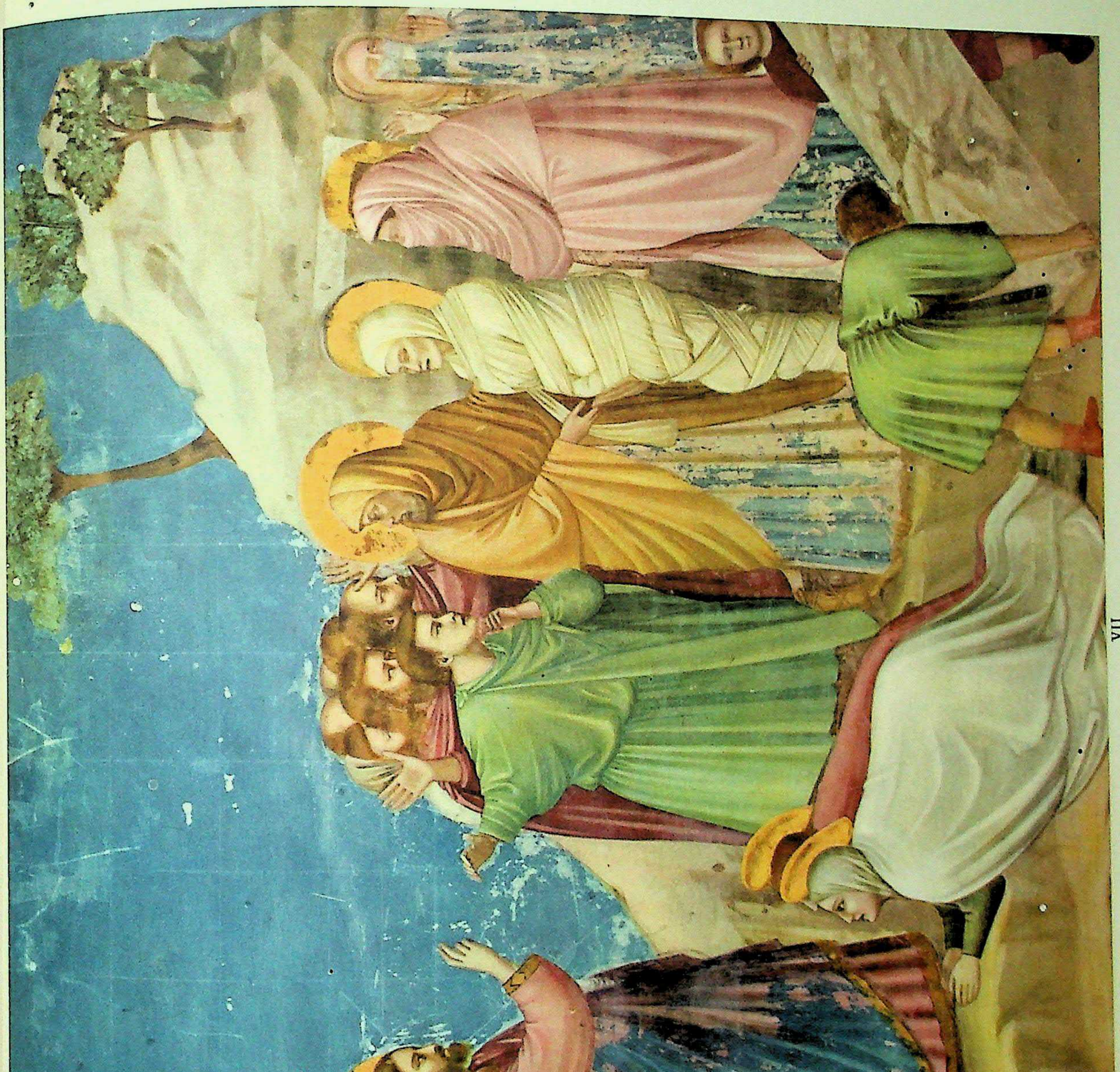

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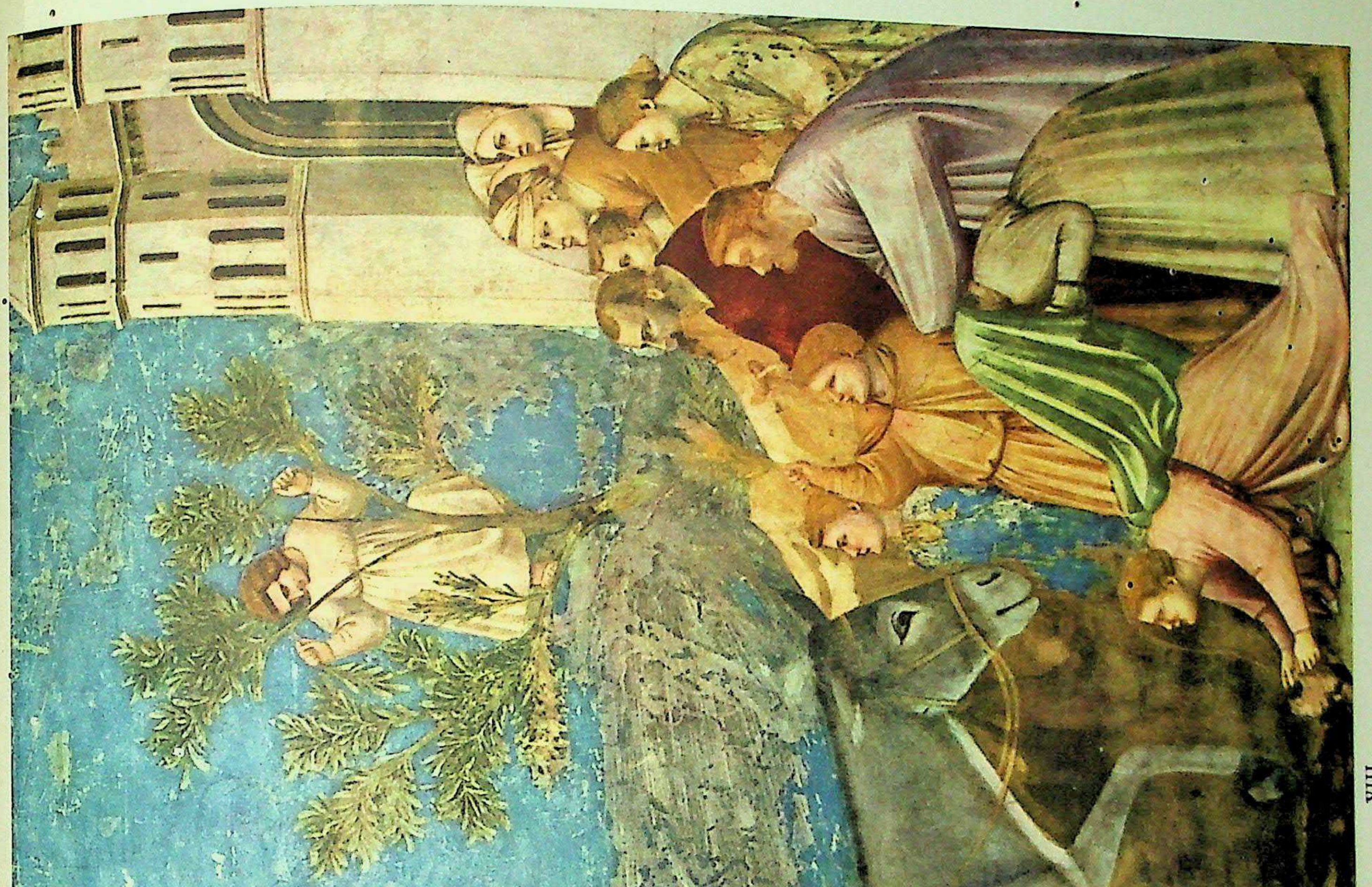

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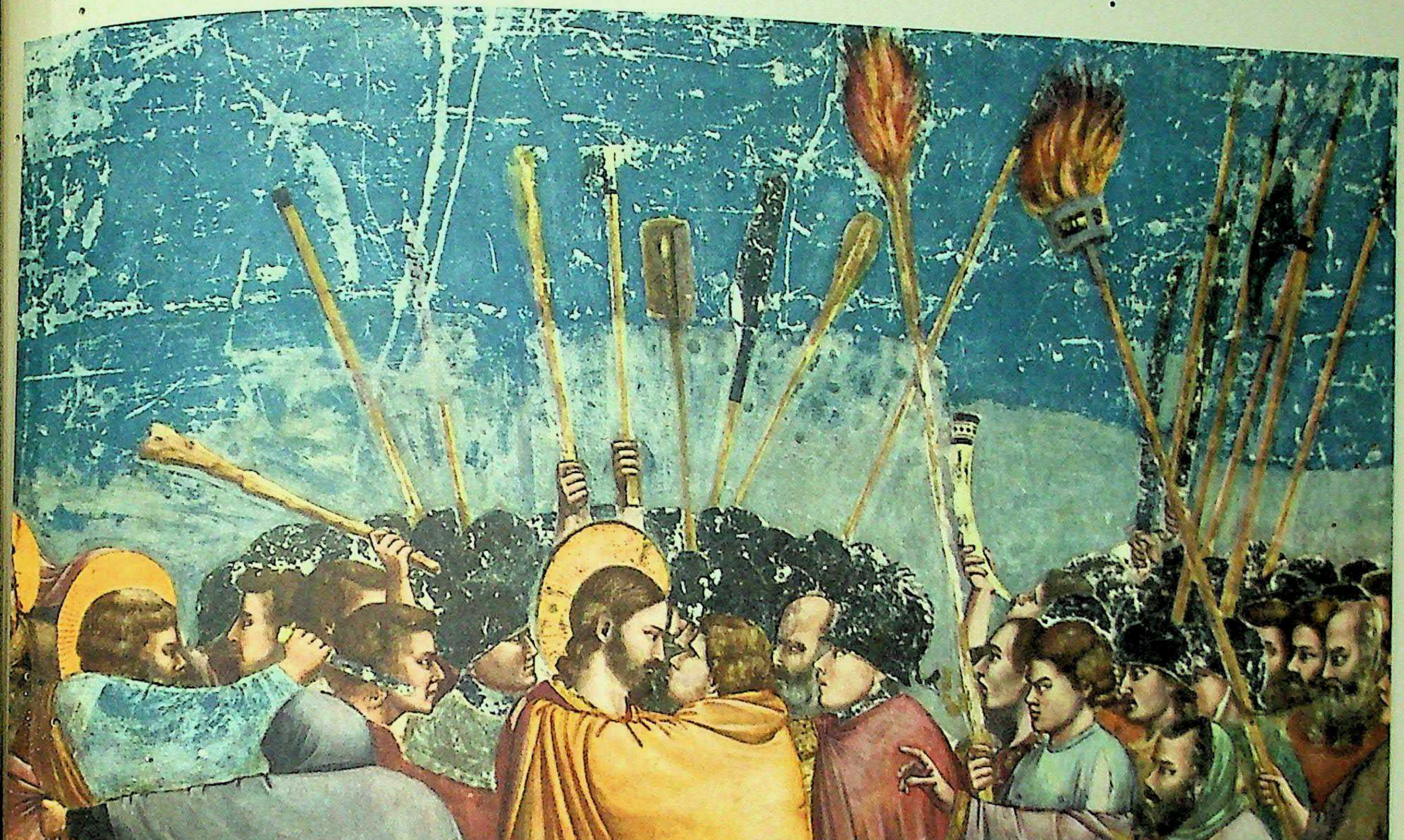

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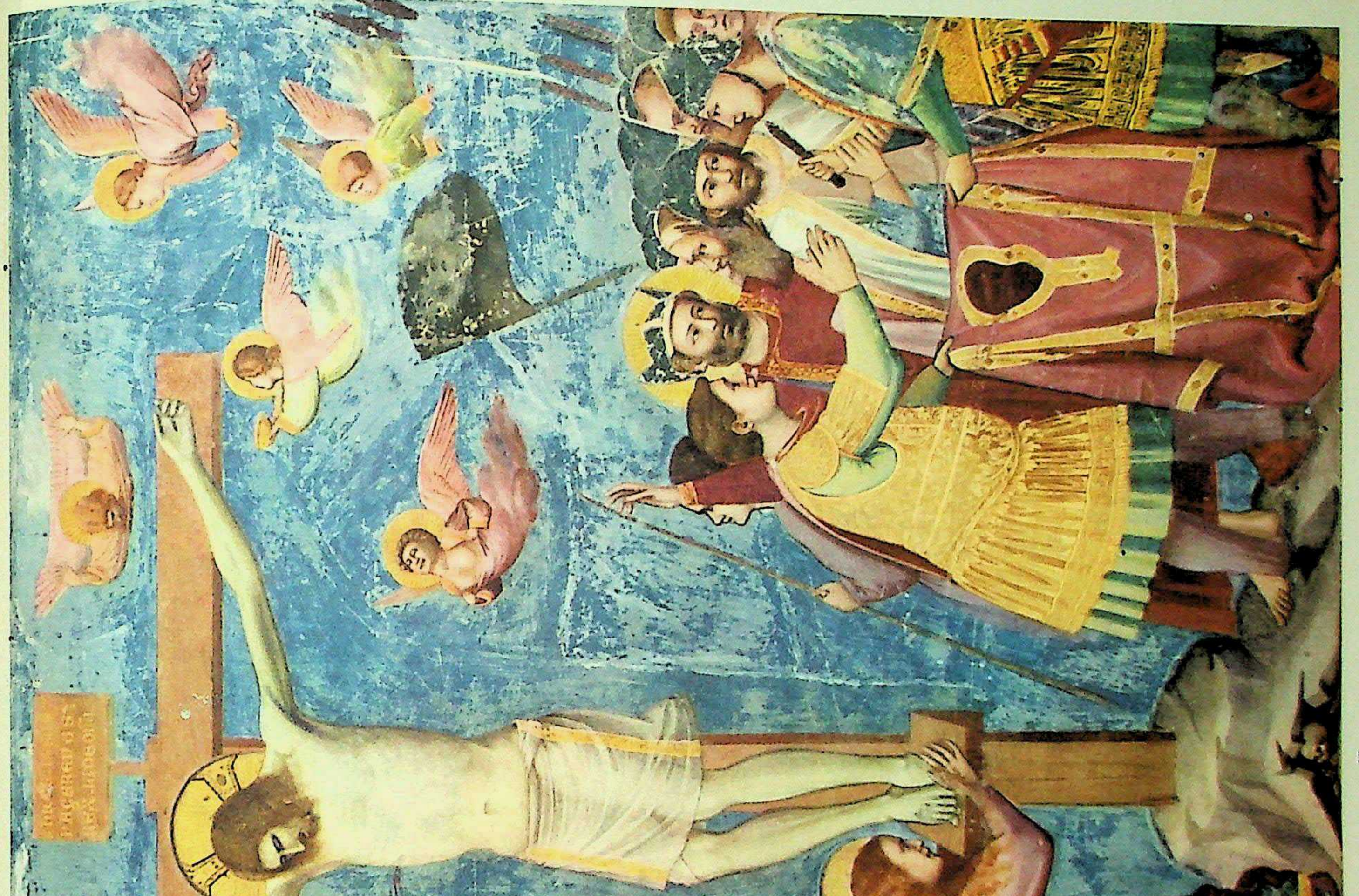

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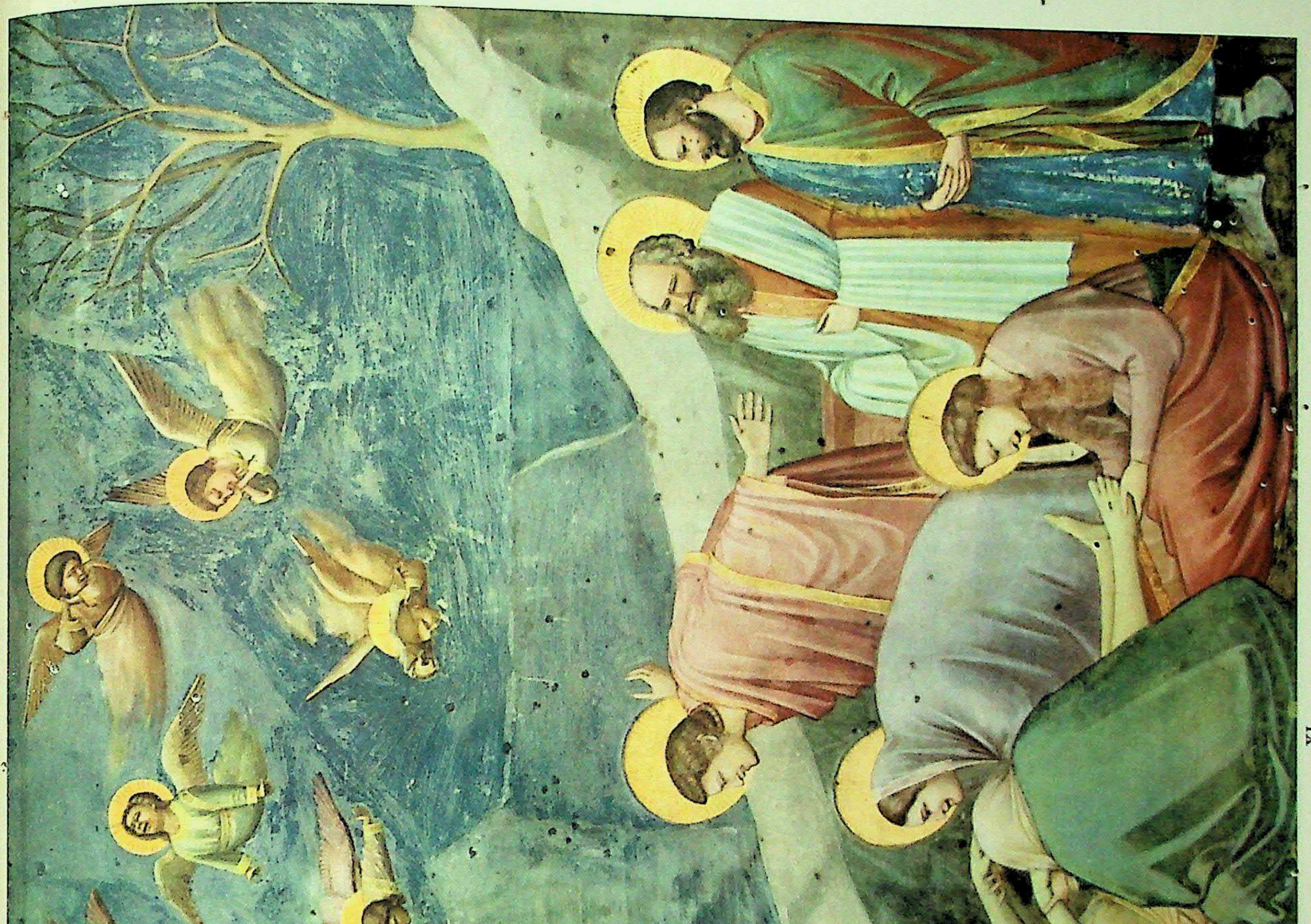

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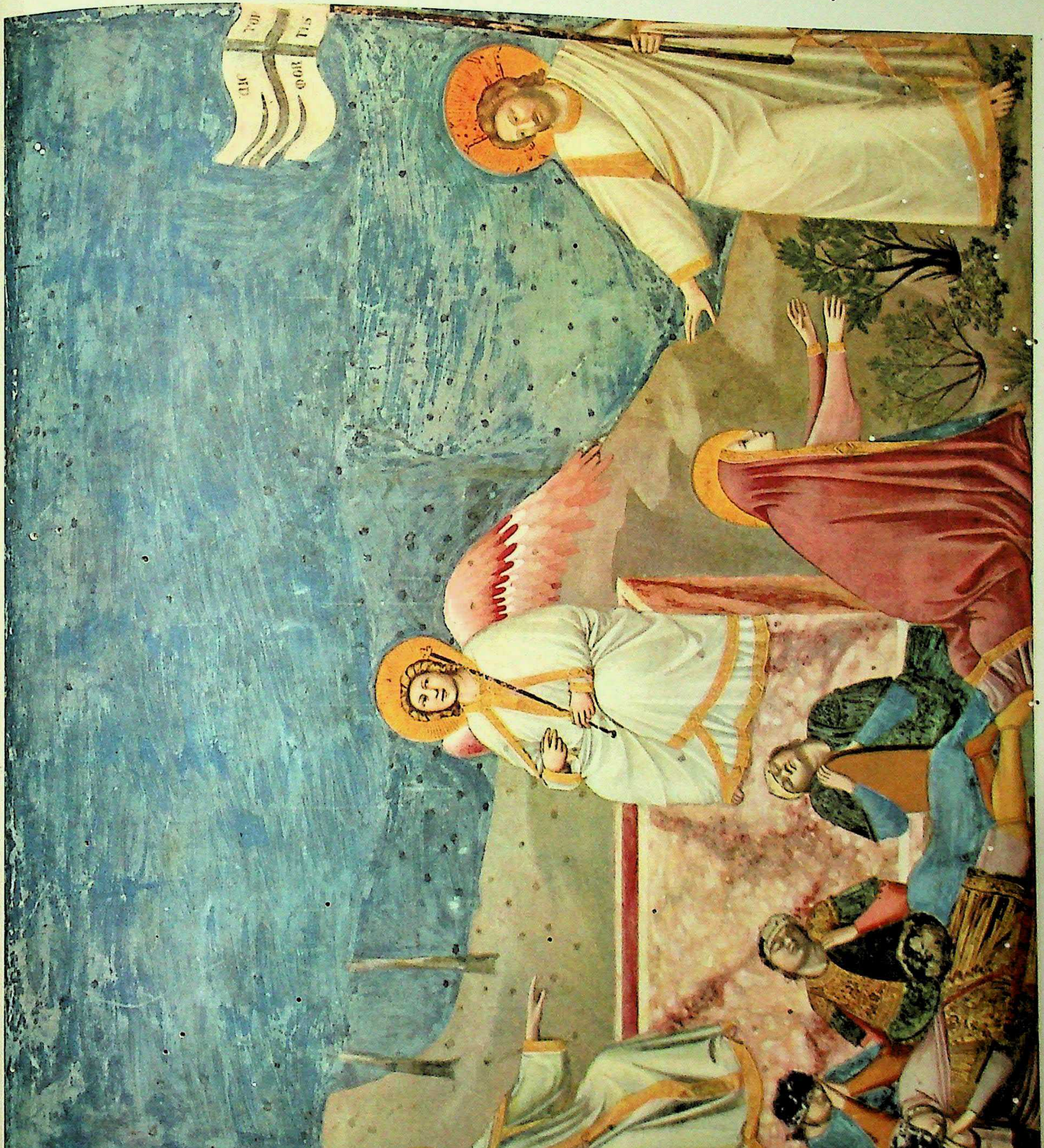

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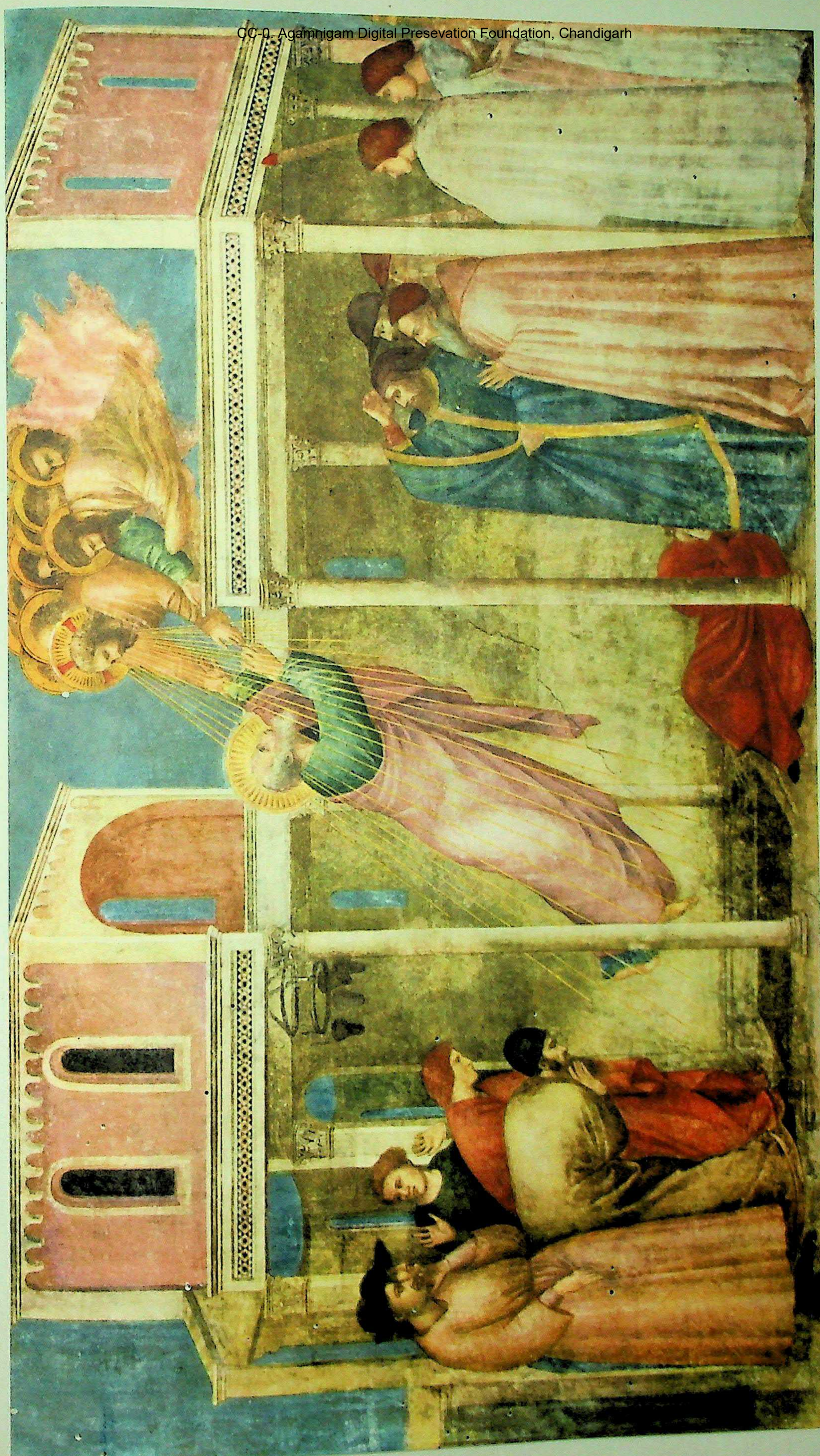

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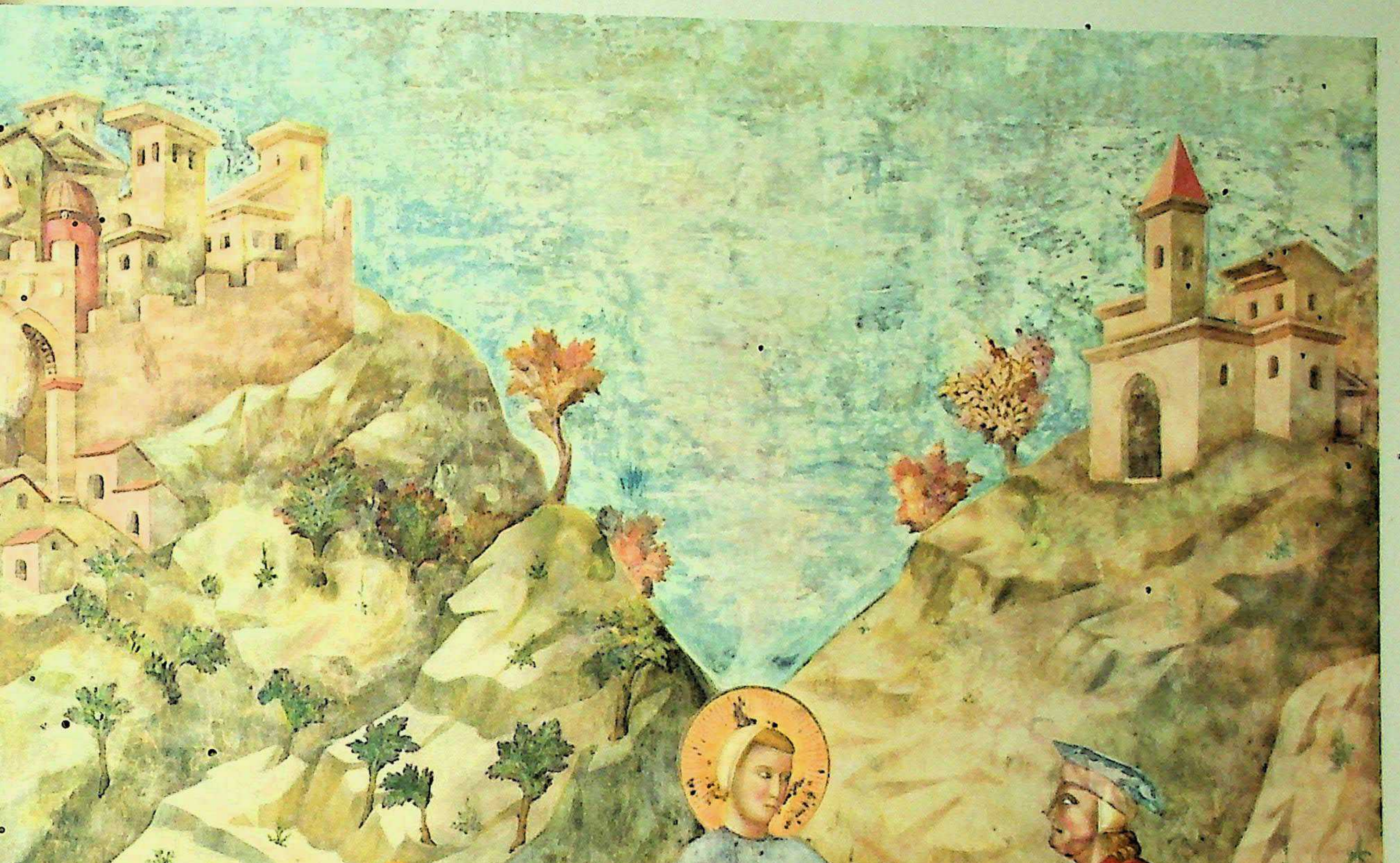

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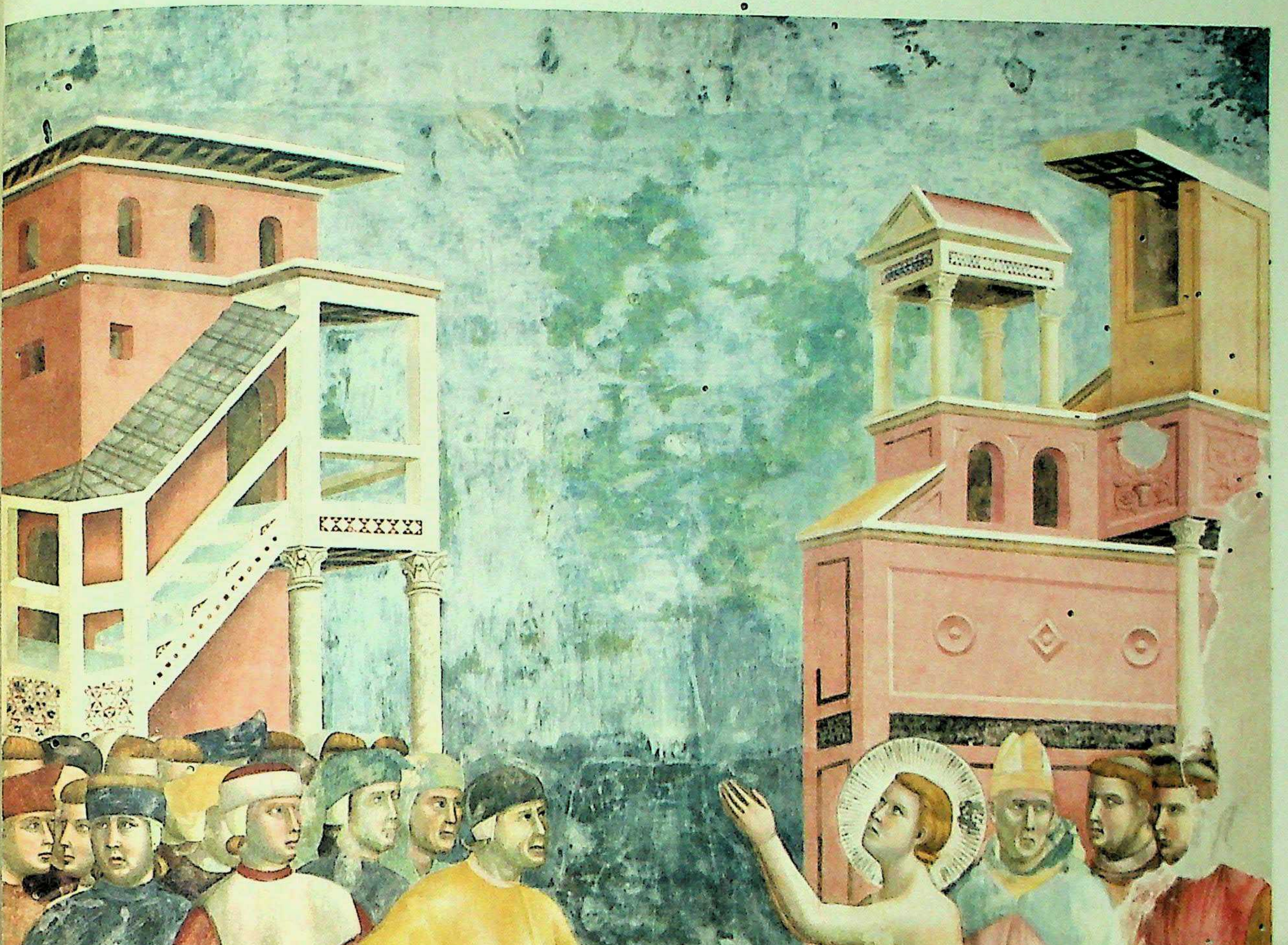

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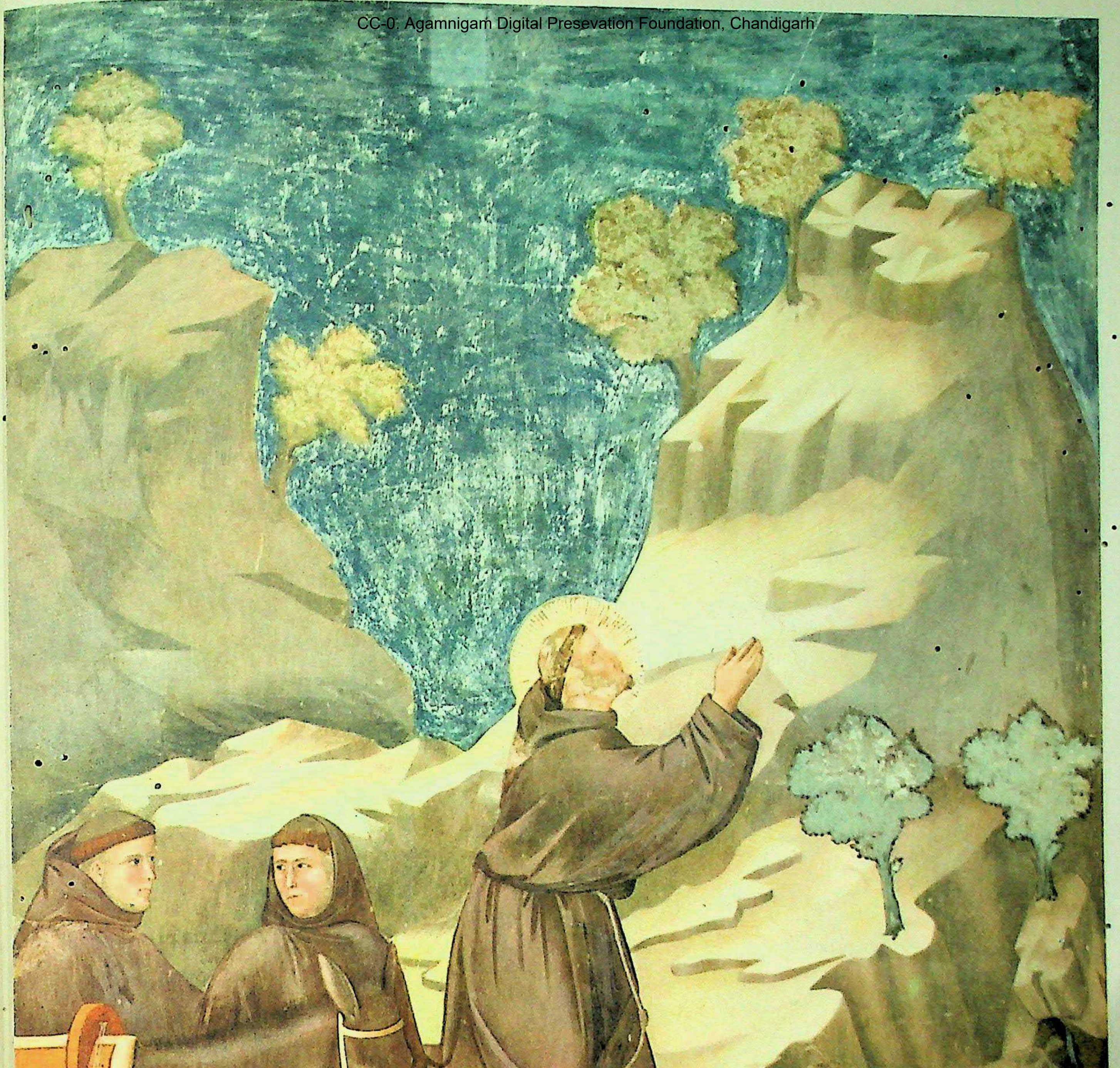

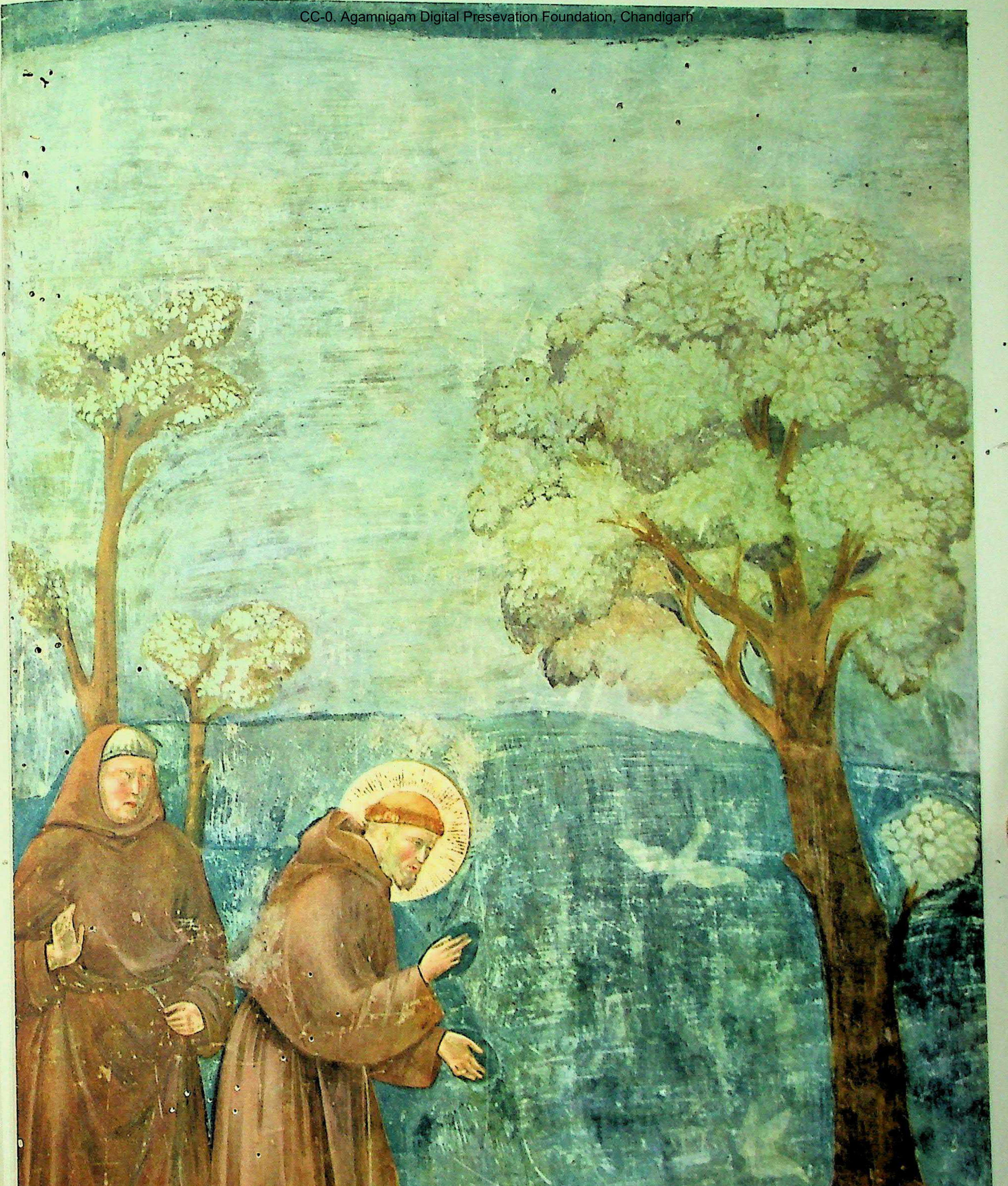

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